

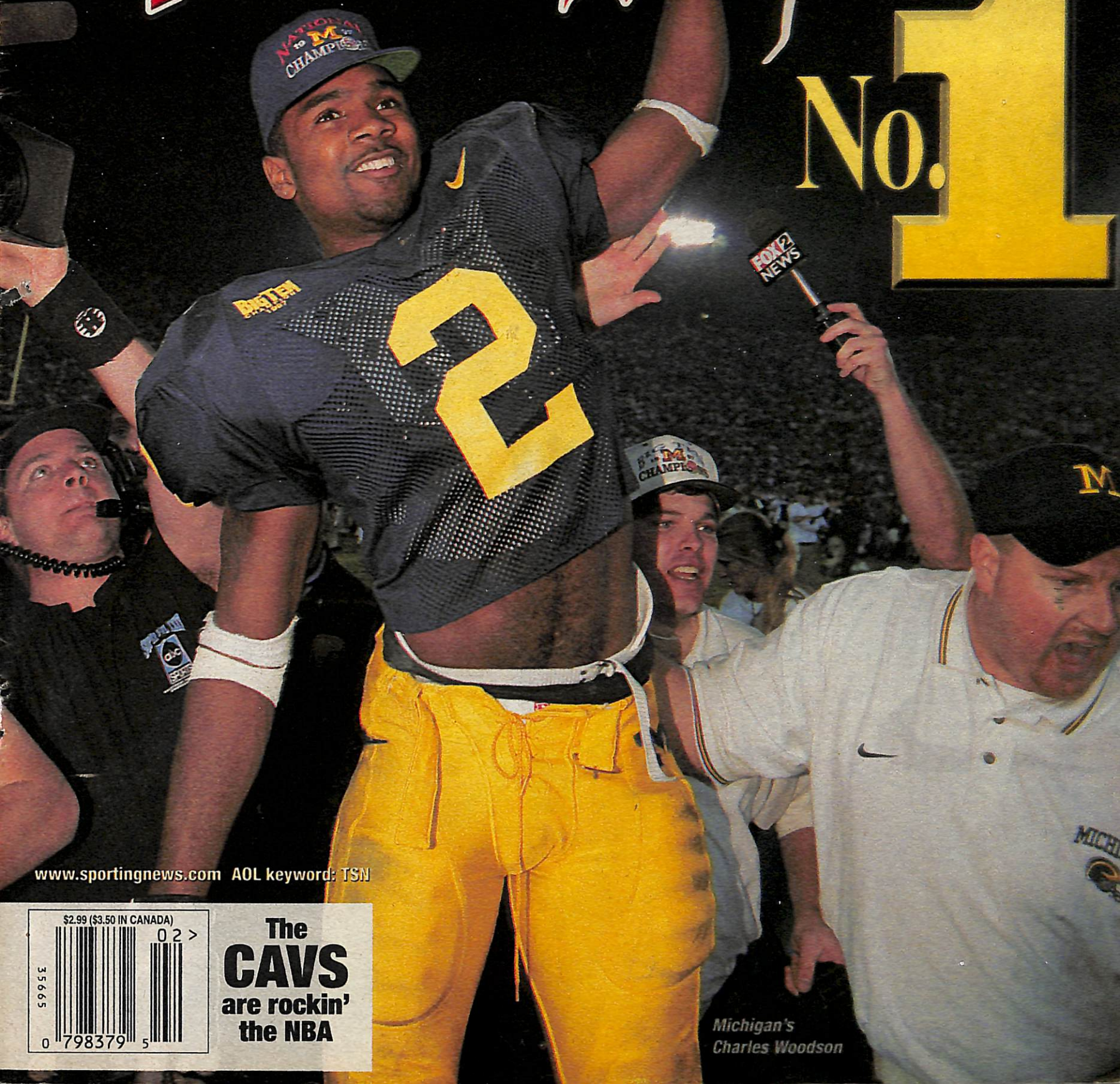
THE NFL's FINAL FOUR

# The Sporting News

See a Different Game

DISPLAY UNTIL JANUARY 14, 1998

# No. 1



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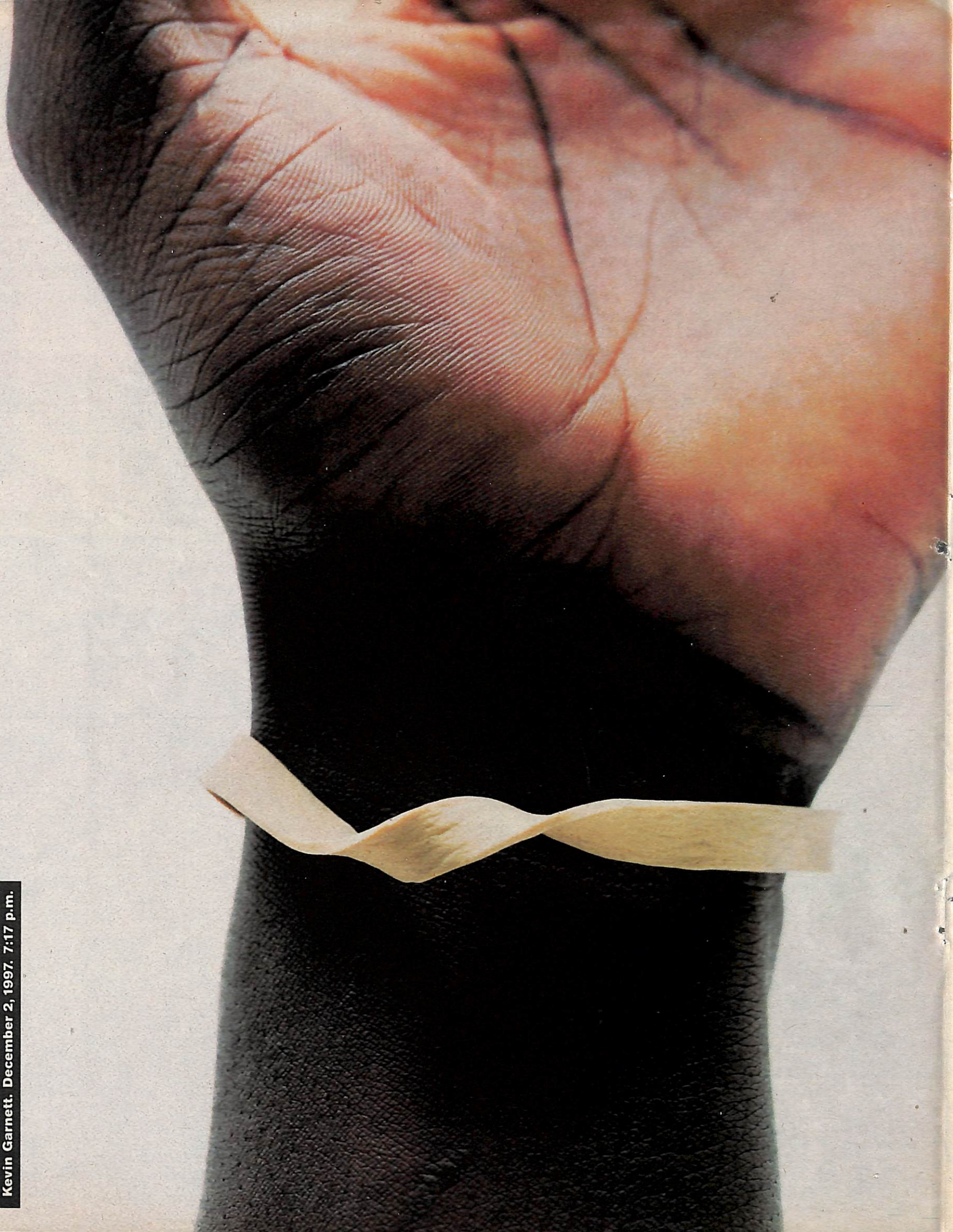
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See a Different Game

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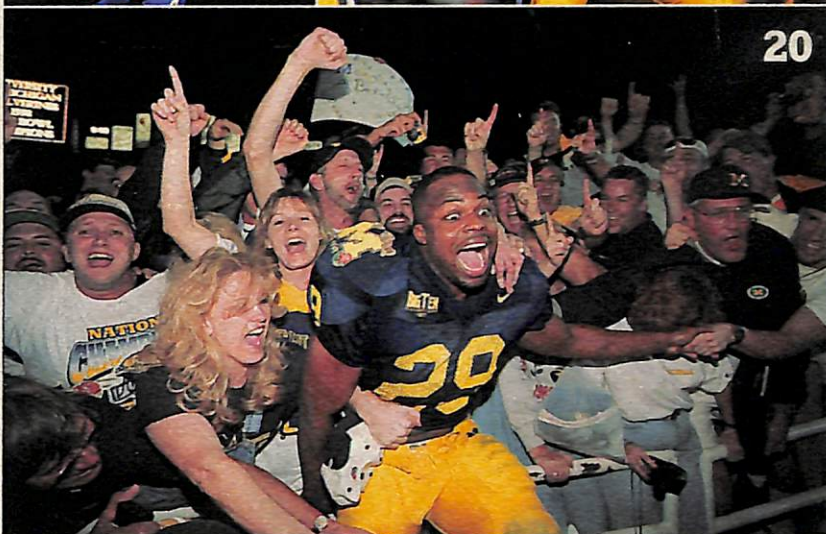
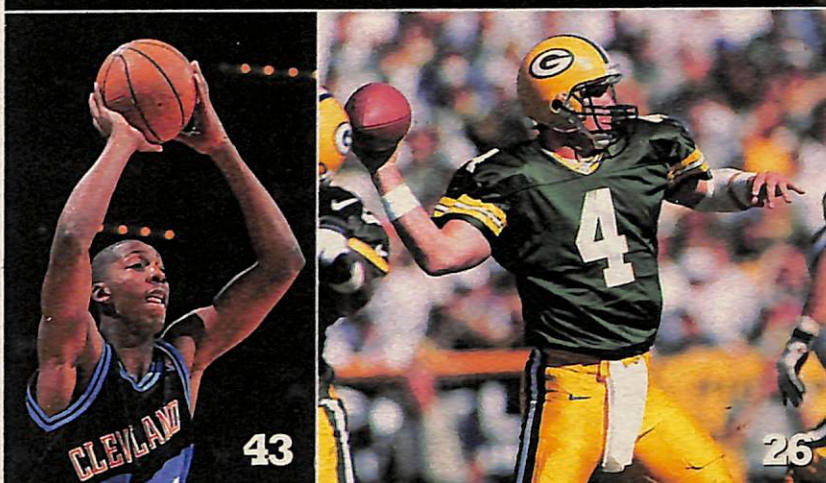
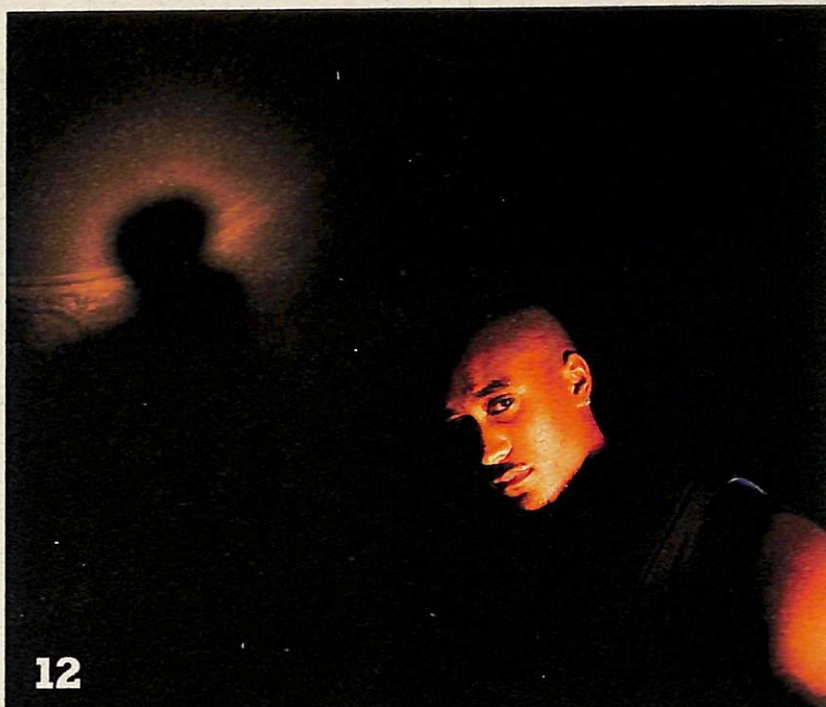
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In college basketball, the biggest story often is not the players; it's the coaches.

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## From the Editor

# Deserving a second chance

Why is it we are so fast to condemn athletes who make serious mistakes in their private lives and then are so slow to accept them back as competitors? That is one question that should have been asked—but never was—in the midst of all the turbulence that surrounded Richie Parker two years ago.

Parker, a talented basketball player, committed a horrible crime when he and a friend sexually assaulted a female student at Manhattan Center High School. Seton Hall withdrew its scholarship offer to Parker, and school after school was harassed into dropping any interest it showed in him. As a society, we were eager to condemn the act, as we should have, but no one was brave enough to talk about contrition and the second chance it should bring. Why can't we prudently distinguish between just punishment and persecution?

Parker is beginning his

sophomore season at Long Island University, and Mike DeCourcy, who writes our weekly Insider column and covers college basketball for the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, examines the reclamation of Parker's basketball life in a penetrating story that starts on page 12.

"I was surprised by him from the start," DeCourcy says. Parker was early for the interview and escorted DeCourcy across the campus. "Almost like he'd come out to meet me and get the interview off to a good start. Whatever I asked, there wasn't a moment's hesitance.

"Parker is a better player than I expected. He has offensive skills that most players his size (6-5) lack, and I appreciate the fact he willingly plays inside against bigger players to make LIU a better team."

His mother, Rosita Parker, expressed dismay that every story about her son has to mention the assault. "I told her

that without that part, no one would understand how he has changed," DeCourcy says. "She told me, 'He has a second chance. My joy is seeing him play. I never thought I would see him on the court ... it looked like no one was going to give him that chance.'"

I wholeheartedly agree with Mike when he says, "I know there are people out there, some of them my colleagues, who continue to condemn LIU for accepting Parker and making him part of their team. They've never met him, though, and I suspect wouldn't want to. It's easier to think of Richie Parker as a concept than as a person. As a person, though, he seems to be someone who wants to do right and make his life worthwhile."

*John Rawlings*

E-mail John Rawlings at [jrawlings@sportingnews.com](mailto:jrawlings@sportingnews.com)

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# Voice of the Fan

**Choice voice** 'Regarding your Top 100 (TSN, December 22). TSN deserves all the praise in the world for omitting the one man who thinks he's more powerful than anyone on the planet, let alone in sports: Jerry Jones.'

Scott Ballard  
Dallas

## Knight and day

When is Dave Kindred going to tire of defending the infantile behavior of Bobby Knight (TSN, January 5)? He wrote yet another column telling us how much he admires this "model" for America's youth. Apparently Mr. Kindred believes that vilification of your players and the constant use of obscene language constitutes good coaching. As a reporter looking for good copy, Mr. Kindred may think that "characters" such as Bob Knight are great. But I don't think Knight should be held up as anyone to admire.

Bernie Mesmer  
Louisville, Ky.

## Frei cooks

Surely the same inspired people who came up with your new and wonderfully improved magazine can't be the same people who hired a Colorado writer to pen the Tom Osborne retirement story. The Denver media are notorious for their anti-Husker articles. One of the greatest coaches of all time certainly deserved better.

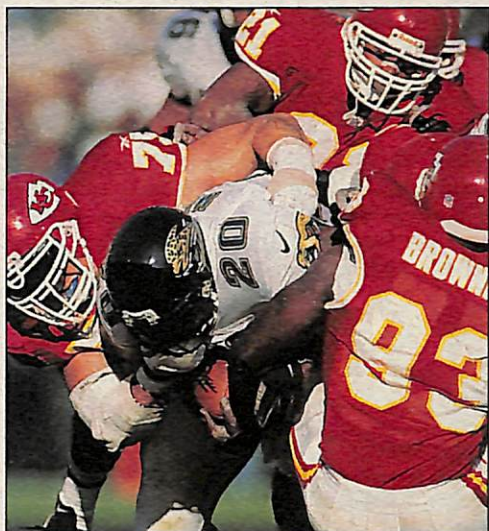
Frank Holub  
Clancy, Mont.

Terry Frei, who wrote about Osborne's retirement (TSN, December 22), wrote two stories on Nebraska when he was a contributing writer for TSN. One,

*'A Place Like No Other' (TSN, October 31, 1994), captured the Nebraska college football weekend experience. The other, 'Corn-fed Beef' (TSN's 1996 College Football Yearbook), extolled the virtues of Nebraska's offensive line. Frei covers a variety of sports, including college football, for the Denver Post.*

## Big D

Great statement, "Why the road to the Super Bowl goes through Kansas City." (TSN January 5.) But why did you put an over-the-hill running back, Marcus Allen, on the cover? As a Broncos fan, I know the only reason Kansas City is in the playoffs is because of its outstanding defense and very good job by a journeyman quarterback. Your cover should have shown 11 outstanding men on defense with a



**ROCK SOLID:** John Browning (93) and the Chiefs' defense have been doing the job all season long.



## Jordan rules

Our selection of Michael Jordan as the Most Powerful Man in Sports continues to touch a nerve—and it's a raw one. Most of our readers take us to task for the choice, mainly because it's hard to relate to a guy making millions of dollars.

Wrote Tony Nicol of Temperance, Mich.: "Michael Jordan is not the Most Powerful Person in Sports. If he were he wouldn't have asked for a \$36 million contract; he would have taken a pay cut to help out his team."

Ed Einloth of Pittsburgh sent the same sentiment, but has a suggestion: "Just because someone is making millions of dollars a year doesn't particularly make him powerful. ... My vote: The Fan. ... Not to be even mentioned on your list is a slap in the face to everybody from Jack Nicholson courtside at (Inglewood's) Forum to Harry the Whale in the upper deck at (Pittsburgh's) Civic Arena. And on top of that, a fictional character and a puppet are on the list. Rodney Dangerfield thinks he gets no respect!"

Reader Terry R. Austin of Paragould, Ariz., thought TSN took a step backward: "Jordan is the most powerful man in sports, yet he still is little more than the NBA's spoiled brat. His implied threats, his efforts to throw the labor process into upheaval and his manipulation of his own team indicate Jordan has chosen to use his 'power' to benefit only himself. TSN has proved itself hypocritical by honoring a tyrant like Jordan only one week after elevating Mark McGwire. Make up your mind, TSN, then act with some semblance of responsibility and character."

defensive coach wearing big smiles.

Gordon Kaufman  
Peyton, Colo.

## Barry gets no respect

Barry Sanders must be the most elusive back in NFL history. He rushes for 2,053 yards and TSN puts Marcus Allen on the cover. Give me a break. What does Barry need to do in order to receive recognition, rush for 3,000 yards in a season?

Kris Krohn  
Prospect, Ky.

## Love of Mike

College basketball is getting too big to allow coverage by only one

writer. Mike DeCourcy does a fine job covering the ACC and SEC but seems to ignore the rest of the country. His coverage of the Big East is sketchy and condescending at best, and he seems to allow his feelings of ACC superiority to cloud his objectivity for other conferences. Maybe you should get someone else to cover the rest of college basketball.

Henry Rosenberg  
South Windsor, Conn.

TSN college basketball columnist Mike DeCourcy also works for the Cincinnati Enquirer, for whom he covers Conference

USA and Cincinnati. He is also its national basketball columnist.

## Drop-kick coverage

I really loved your Orange Bowl and Rose Bowl previews (TSN, December 29). It's terrific TSN has scouted the games that well and lets us know a little bit of what to expect. The insight from Kirk Herbstreit is great, too. Keep up the good work.

Chad Birger  
Harrisburg, S.D.

## Whoa, Pete

The media bash our national pastime far too much, and I'm getting tired of reading about how bad baseball has become. I simply love the game, and I am not alone. But what happened to the "Bible of Baseball"? I'm referring to Peter Schmuck's column on the "Golden Schmuck" awards (TSN, January 5). Please, more articles that praise baseball instead of bashing it.

Kirt Bennett  
Madison, Wis.

## Spaz on Chaz

The hype on Charles Woodson and Michigan is starting to wear on real football fans in this country. Granted, Woodson had some great moments. He had some bad moments, too, but we never heard of them thanks to Michigan's sports information department. Peyton Manning and Ryan Leaf had bad games, too, but the point is they were involved in every offensive play in one way or the other. The Heisman voters really fell for the hype, just as you guys did at TSN.

David Baxter  
Galena, Kan.

**Got a comment?** THE SPORTING NEWS would love to hear from you. Write Voice of the Fan, 10176 Corporate Square Drive, Suite 200, St. Louis, MO 63132, fax your message to us at 314-997-0765, or send us electronic mail at fans@sportingnews.com. Be sure to include your name and city with your e-mail. THE SPORTING NEWS reserves the right to edit letters for brevity and content.



# TSNights

## An age-old question



Hey, didn't you used to be the Bowl Alliance?

■ **El Duque Hernandez's** three pitches (fastball, curve, change) are "major league average," one scout tells the Spies, and his heater ticks at 90 on the gun. But the number that caught Fly's attention is 28. That's how old **Livan's** half-bro says he is in Cuban-pitcher years (see: **Arocha, Rene**), which doesn't leave much/any time to develop in the minors.

■ Speaking of brothers and pitching, yeah, that was a "Will Pitch for Food" letter all 30 M-L-B teams got from **Jim McDowell**, who reps brother **Black Jack**, 32 and comin' off elbow

surgery last May. Buzz is the Pinstripes're among a handful nibblin' the bait, but another \$9.6 mil deal? Forgetaboutit.

■ **Obligatory '98** buzz after Bowlzzzzz Week: K-State cuh-rushes 'Cuse in the Fiesta, has 18 starters back and gets NUbraska and Texas at home. All that's missin' is some heft to that non-conference schedule (Question: How many directional Louisiana schools does it take to screw up a national title run? Fly doesn't know, but **Bill Snyder** should.)

■ Hey-yo, Sixers fans (both of ya), this here team's on its fifth coach in its five-year plan (wouldn't **Fred Carter**'ve been cheaper?), but look on the bright side: You get to start all over again (again) next season. 'Spoon, **Jim Jackson** and **Theo Ratliff** are free agents and **D.C.**'s gonna get



**VIKING FUNERAL?** Green says he has proof positive that everyone's out to get him—or to get him out—in Minnesota.

his ducat punched. Says **Larry Brown**: "Some things that start off bad are worth waiting for." And other things ...

■ Speaking of sorry NBA teams, Fly's dream matchup: UnRaptors vs. No-guts.

that, that their No. 1 objective was to run **Dennis Green** out of town." Holy **Ollie Stone**, it ain't just the weather that's gonna turn ugly up in Minnesoota this offseason.

■ The Dodgers' O.D. lineup could have **Roger Cedeno** in center, **Todd Hollandsworth** in left and **Antonio Osuna** as the closer. And G.M. **Fred Claire** tells the Spies: "I believe we will be a better team in 1998 than in 1997?" Hey-yo, looks to Fly (shaddup!) like this team's verry quiet offseason can be read this way: **Formerly Most Powerful Rupe** doesn't want a bunch of expensive fixtures added to the house before this here \$310 mil deal closes escrow.

■ Finally, that was not a smile on **Chuck Daly's** face when he heard that **Penny** took time out from rehabbin' bum knee in Houston to say: "I'll be back in Orlando when I'm well again. I still hope to be back playing either just before or after the All-Star break."

## The Starting Five

What the sports world is talking about this week

- 1 NFL conference championships.** For the AFC, it's as close as you get to the real thing.
- 2 Andy Benes leaves St. Louis.** It was a taxing situation. And speaking of taxes, the Cardinals say don't forget that April 16 deadline.
- 3 Hawaii beats No. 1 Kansas.** The biggest thing to hit the Islands since gouging tourists.
- 4 Livan Hernandez's half-brother.** A Cuban refugee chooses his new country based on baseball's free-agent rules. Fehr? We thought he was saying fear.
- 5 The Nuggets celebrate 30 years of professional basketball.** It would've been 31, but they couldn't count this season.

## sportTSNnumbers



If Ryan Leaf gets a chance to start next season, he will become the sixth former Washington State quarterback to play in the NFL in the past 20 years. The ex-Cougars' first-year fortunes have ranged from **Mark Rypien**, who didn't play a down for the Redskins in 1986 (or '87), to **Drew Bledsoe**, who started 12 games in 1993. Lost among the big names is **Ricky Turner**, who played one season for the Colts (1988). Former Washington State QBs' stats in the first season in which each got into a regular-season game:

Player	Year drafted	Team	First action	Att	Comp	Yds	TD	Int	Passer rating
Ricky Turner	—	Colts	1988	4	3	92	0	0	116.2
Mark Rypien	1986	Rams	1988	208	114	1,730	18	13	85.2
Drew Bledsoe	1993	Patriots	1993	429	214	2,494	15	15	65.0
Jack Thompson	1979	Bengals	1979	87	39	481	1	5	42.4
Timm Rosenbach	1989*	Cardinals	1989	22	9	95	0	1	35.2

\*Supplemental draft



## Our view of the week

### Wrong number

All Texas A&M was trying to do was give a much-needed thumbs-up to a fellow Aggie (proof, as alums say, that there's no such thing as an ex-Aggie because once an Aggie, always an Aggie).

But the NCAA again showed its inability to grasp the human side of the games it governs when it turned down A&M's request to wear No. 59 patches against UCLA in the Cotton Bowl. The patch was to have been a tribute to fallen former star Reggie Brown, recovering in Detroit from a career-ending neck injury in a Lions game.

"Memorial numbers are not legal," said Tod Breidenthal of the NCAA. "I don't think you memorialize somebody who is still living."

As one columnist put it: "Coming from the brain dead, the decision makes sense."

### Plenty of time

Kansas fans can look on the bright side about their team's loss to Hawaii: It was relatively early in the season, and it was without Raef LaFrentz.

The Jayhawks will have plenty of time to recover from their first non-conference road loss since 1994, and they *will* recover as soon as LaFrentz's broken right hand is healed.

More important, however, KU will have a chance to prove it is the best team come March, when championships are decided by players, not voters.

### 'Queen Helen'

The mists of time obscure the accomplishments of Helen Wills Moody Roark, who died last week at 92.

As Helen Wills, she won 31 major titles—including eight at Wimbledon, seven at the U.S. Open and four in the French Open. More than 50 years later, only Martina Navratilova has captured more Wimbledon singles titles.



My turn/Bill Plaschke

# Lamenting Clemente

**In 1997, we did a good job of remembering Jackie Robinson, but somehow we seem to have overlooked the legacy of Roberto Clemente**

The Year of Jackie Robinson ended last week, and what a time we had. We celebrated, we studied, we remembered. We were socially conscious, we were diversity sensitive. *We ... were ... fam-i-ly.*

We were so busy patting ourselves on the back, we forgot all about Roberto Clemente.

The 50th anniversary of Robinson's shattering of baseball's color line occurred just eight months before the 25th anniversary of Clemente's death, yet the events are being treated as different as Easter and Christmas.

Granted, Clemente was not the first of anything in the major leagues. He broke records, not barriers. He was harassed by opposing pitchers, not little redneck second basemen.

Robinson forced change that was recognized throughout society; Clemente was rarely appreciated outside of Pittsburgh.

But when Clemente died in a plane crash on December 31, 1972, baseball was left with an image that forever changed the way it treated what has become its largest minority.

With a strong will and inspiring ability—his final hit was his 3,000th—Clemente forced baseball officials to begin accepting Hispanics as they were. He quietly pushed them to understand the cultural differences. He insisted baseball stop treating them like children.

Twenty-five years after Clemente, a native of Puerto Rico, died on a relief mission to Nicaragua, diamonds are filled with signs his cause was not in vain.

Dominican Pedro Martinez signs a \$75 million contract to pitch in conservative Boston.

Puerto Rican Sandy Alomar Jr. is MVP of the All-Star Game.

Cuban Livan Hernandez is MVP of the World Series. Nearly 19 percent of all major leaguers are Hispanic.

Baseball spends millions on recruiting Hispanics, from the jungles of Venezuela to the sparkling Dodger dormitories in the Dominican Republic.

"Today, the Latin player coming in is treated like a king," says Mike Brito, the Dodger scout who signed Fernando Valenzuela. "If he is any good, he gets everything."

And why not? Baseball knows it needs those who play with not just passion, but hunger. Baseball knows it needs potential greatness wherever it can find it. Baseball can be forward-thinking like that.

But baseball, alas, can still be old and dumb. As with Robinson's mission, this is still a work in progress.

"There are still two stereotypes about Latin ballplayers—



MALCOLM W. EMONS

**HIS ACTIONS SPOKE LOUDLY: In 1967, Clemente was in the prime of his career.**

that they are hotheaded, or that they don't have inner drive," says Dr. Milton Jamail, professor of Latin American studies at the University of Texas. "Because of the barriers, coaches don't take the time to work through these attitudes."

You know the rap. A white player in your town who swings at the first pitch is called "aggressive." An Hispanic player with the same tendencies is called "impatient."

A black player who struggles with injuries is called, "unlucky." An Hispanic with the same problem is called "malingerer."

Certainly, many Hispanics have been free swingers, and others have been injury-prone. But to lump them together in categories is the same as naming a 15-year-old as your opening day shortstop simply because he is from San Pedro de Macoris.

Managers won't do the latter ... why do they insist on the former?

"There is still a prejudice," says Jamail, who has spent the last decade researching and writing about Latin American baseball, as well as consulting with major league teams. "It's almost like they are afraid to mess with blacks, but they still think they can pretty much do anything with Latins."

These feelings have sadly carried over into other parts of the game.

Only one major league manager—Montreal's Felipe Alou—is Hispanic. And a recent study by Jamail shows that only one of 120 executives with real personnel power is Hispanic. According to Jamail, only Mets assistant G.M. Omar Minaya has decision-making power over more than just Hispanics.

To properly honor Clemente recently, eight All-Stars from Puerto Rico were scheduled to gather for a four-day celebration. The likes of Bernie Williams, Roberto Alomar and Ivan Rodriguez were to attend concerts, golf tournaments and a "Fanfest" to honor their hero.

You wonder how you could have missed it? Probably because it was in Puerto Rico, far from the great baseball leagues of the United States.

Far from the cities where Clemente recorded a lifetime average of .317 with four batting titles and 12 Gold Gloves in 18 seasons.

Far from stadiums that once housed his diving catches, his cannon arm, his sprints from first to third as if trying to outrun fate.

Far from those who forgot.

TSN

Bill Plaschke is a columnist for the Los Angeles Times and writes a monthly column for THE SPORTING NEWS.

**Sound bite** 'The future beckons, and I look forward to it with anticipation and excitement.'

—Coach-turned-retiree Marv Levy, 72



## Diary

### Larry Bird

Coach/Indiana Pacers

The Pacers have been one of the biggest surprises in the NBA, thanks to a first-year coach known as "Larry Legend." One of the greatest players in league history, Larry Bird reflects on the differences between playing in Boston and coaching in Indiana with TSN correspondent Mark Montieth of the Indianapolis Star-News.

I really like living in Indiana again. People are pleasant. I like doing things around the yard. I like going for a run early in the morning. I can do those sort of things here without feeling uncomfortable.

It's different going out in Indiana than it was in Boston. There you didn't know what you were going to get yourself into.

It's different on the East Coast. People



DAVID SEELIG / ALL SPORT

there are really fans, and they own a piece of you. They didn't just ask for autographs. Sometimes they'd just come over and sit down and stay there until you were done.

It was tougher in Boston, because we lived on a street that was a shortcut to the interstate, so all kinds of people were driving by. I couldn't really work in the front yard, because people would be honking their horns and yelling stuff

or even stopping. I had to stay in back most of the time.

I'm really enjoying coaching, though. I love the game days. It's different than when I played, because then I had more control. Now I can only sit there and watch. But it's exciting. It makes the adrenaline flow. But there's a lot more to coaching than I thought there'd be.

It's not just the press, there's a little bit of everything. In the office they want you to do this, this and this. People are always writing in wanting something, to speak here and do this. They don't understand, this is a full-time job. But we get paid well, and I enjoy it.

The Daily Diary is a regular feature on THE SPORTING NEWS' website at [www.sportingnews.com](http://www.sportingnews.com) and on AOL, keyword: TSN.

## Q&A

Could you please explain to me how you calculate your quarterback ratings? I enjoy numbers, and I can't figure it out.

Raymond Meservey  
Las Vegas

First, they're not our QB ratings, though even if they were we wouldn't claim anything so convoluted. Second, which quarterback rating are you talking about? The NCAA's passing efficiency formula and the NFL's passer rating system are different. The former takes into account 1) completion percentage, 2) yards per attempted pass, 3) touchdowns per attempted pass and 4) interceptions per attempted pass; the latter takes into account 1) percentage of touchdown passes per attempt, 2) percentage of

completions per attempt, 3) percentage of interceptions per attempt and 4) average yards gained per attempt. Here's the key to the confusion: Each uses multipliers that rate passers against a fixed performance standard in each category. In the NCAA's formula, an overall rating of 100.0 is the "average quarterback"; in the NFL's, 100.0 denotes the "superior passer." Bottom line: They're not quarterback ratings at all.

As the NFL points out: "The system is used to rate passers, not quarterbacks."

Got a question? Write Q&A, c/o THE SPORTING NEWS, 10176 Corporate Square Drive, Suite 200, St. Louis, MO 63132 or via e-mail to [tsnmail@aol.com](mailto:tsnmail@aol.com). Because of the volume of questions, TSN can't answer them all.

The 49ers' Steve Young narrowly missed recording the third top-10 passer-rating performance of his career this season. Young, who finished with a 104.7 rating, is No. 1 on the NFL's all-time list of single-season passers with a 112.8 rating in 1994. The top 10 single-season passer ratings:

Player	Team	Season	Rating
Steve Young	49ers	1994	112.8
Joe Montana	49ers	1989	112.4
Milt Plum	Browns	1960	110.4
Sammy Baugh	Redskins	1945	109.9
Dan Marino	Dolphins	1984	108.9
Sid Luckman	Bears	1943	107.5
Steve Young	49ers	1992	107.0
Bart Starr	Packers	1966	105.0
Roger Staubach	Cowboys	1971	104.8
Y.A. Tittle	Giants	1963	104.8

## HOTBOX

Two blocks from Camden Yards, where he plied his post-playing career trade, Orioles announcer **Rex Barney** now has an exhibit dedicated to him at the **Babe Ruth Birthplace and Official Orioles Museum**. The "Thank Yoooouuu, Rex" exhibit—named for Barney's trademark call—opened December 19 and contains objects Barney used while announcing games. His mike, binoculars, a block of wood he used as a paperweight and scorecards (even he couldn't tell the players without one) are placed as he would have arranged them in the press box. Just Baltimore's way of saying, "Thank Yoooouuu."

Contact the Babe Ruth Birthplace and Official Orioles Museum at 410-727-1539 or [www.baberuthmuseum.com](http://www.baberuthmuseum.com).

**COLLECTIBLES** With less than a month to go before the Nagano Games, the Olympic logo is popping up in the strangest places, from beer cans to delivery trucks. But if you want official kitsch, you've got to order from a 110-page catalogue of Olympic-licensed products. Among the stuff: **Gold medallions.** The old standby of Olympic goodies, Nagano's medallions will be 34.5 grams of solid gold with motif of a young woman, a snowflake and mountains. A steal at ... \$1,160? **Karaoke CD.** Performed by two well-known (their words) Japanese singers, one a native of the Nagano area. \$8.50. **Little Rika, the Ice Dancer Doll.** Little Rika is Japan's version of Barbie, and here she's on a platform spinning with her Ken pal, Isamu. \$46. **Snowlets chopsticks.** In a delectable shade of yellow. \$3.50. **Tofu.** That's right, the official bean curd of this Olympiad. \$1.20.

**WELL-EQUIPPED** Wondering as you watch these NFL playoffs about those color-coordinated, ultra-high-top shoes? OK, maybe not, but the orange ones worn by four Broncos did catch our attention. The really big shoe—called the "Pro Shroud D Mid"—eliminates (at least that's what Reebok says) "spatting," in which a player puts on his shoes and then



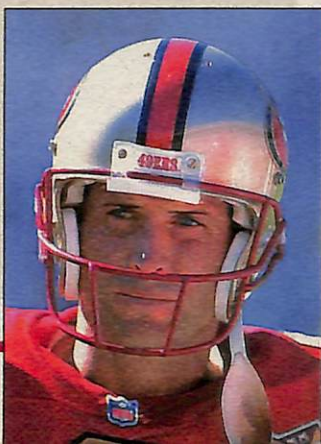
REEBOK

has his ankles taped. Among the options standard with every shoe: Spandex control wrap, pressurized heel locking device, interior active lacing system, athletic radial laces and full-foot dispersion plate.

Kids, don't wear these at home; they are professionals.

**PSSST** OK, what if **Ed McMahon** comes knocking Super Bowl Sunday? Put on more than a towel—please—and get ready to be famous. And take it from a Super Bowl Sunday veteran: Play it cool. In fact, here's **Steve Young's** handy-dandy five-step guide to celebrity dining out: 1) Lose the shades (hiding behind a pair of sunglasses doesn't fool anybody). 2) Replace the entourage with a few low-key friends (teammate **Brent Jones** is the dinner companion of choice on the road). 3) Leave the expensive clothes in the closet. 4) Avoid making an elaborate entrance. 5) Don't try to score the prime table by asking the maitre d', "Do you know who I am?" Young tells the *Contra Costa Times* he doesn't even bother with dinner reservations.

**STARRING ROLE: Young's secret to celebrity? Don't act like one.**



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# Redeeming

**RICHIE PARKER's skills on the basketball court might help people forget about his shaky past**

**By Mike DeCourcy**

**T**he second-hardest thing to figure about Richie Parker is that he's still Richie Parker. He is blessed with one of those first names that can be rearranged in so many ways, but chooses not to use this to his advantage. He could be Richard Parker, or Rick Parker, or Ricky. Initials are an option. He has no middle name, but he is a Junior. He could be R.J. Parker, undersized power forward for the Long Island Blackbirds. Who would know that guy?

There is no pressing need for Richie Parker to cling to a name that still represents a cultural hair-trigger, however much the furor has faded over time. There aren't so many "jailbird" shouts from the stands. He has a home at LIU-Brooklyn and a prominent place with the nation's most exciting college team. Says his mentor, Ernie Lorch of the Riverside Church AAU basketball program, "He has been able to, except for the points and rebounds he produces for his team, stay out of the media." This is Richie Parker's second chance.

Throughout the entire conflagration,



# qualities

though, he never sought the simplest means of escape. "Because that's me," he says. "Richie Parker is me. It's my identity. It doesn't really bother me just because my name comes up and people think of what happened. I've got to focus myself so I have a successful career, where it's 'Richie Parker won the title at LIU' or 'Richie Parker achieved this' or 'Richie Parker got to the NBA.'"

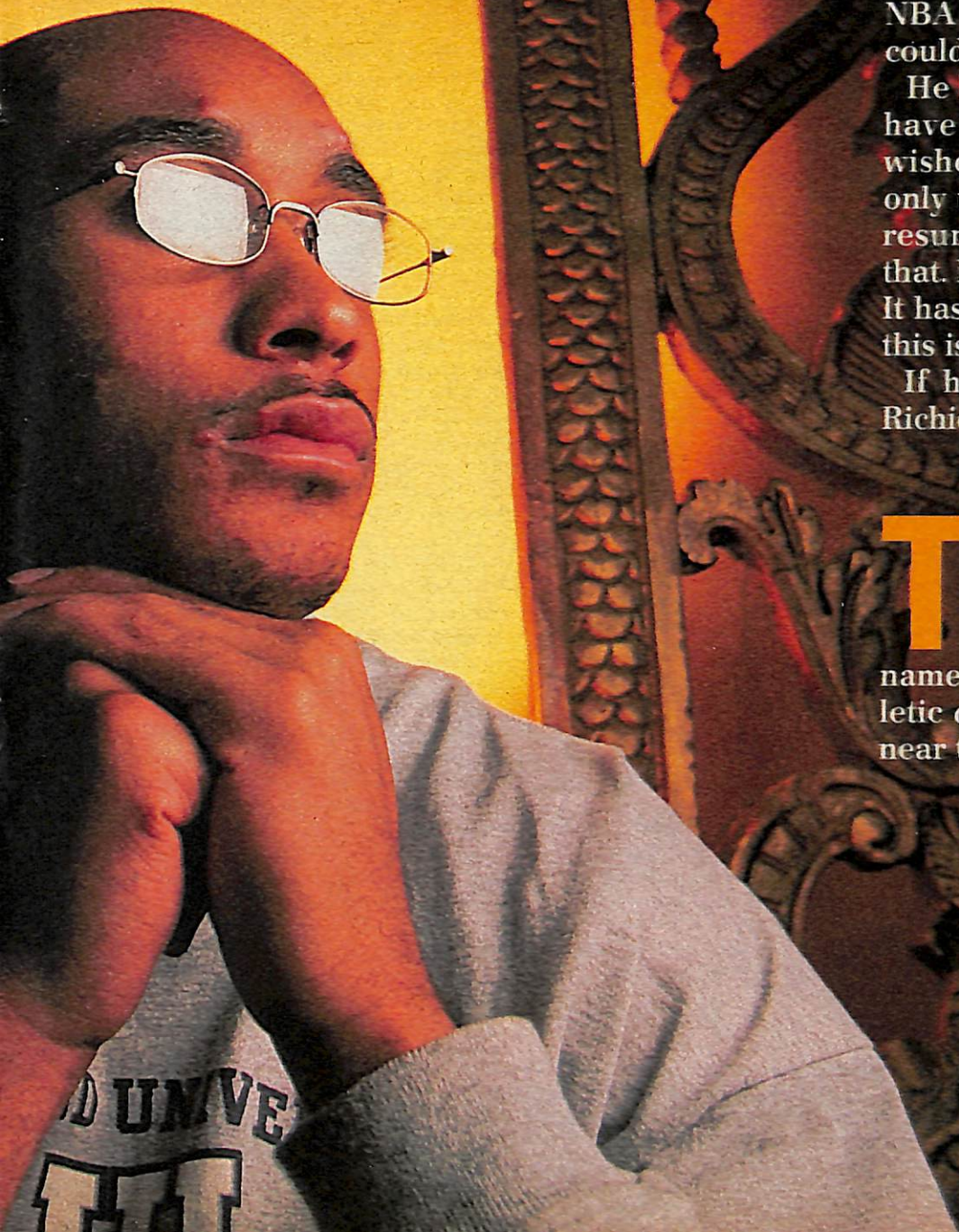
"I wanted to achieve that way, so that when they hear Richie Parker, it's that he made a mistake but now he's a successful NBA player. When they hear my name, it could all be something positive."

He has given this some thought. There have been nights he sat awake and wished to be anyone but Richie Parker, only to get up the following morning and resume the business of being precisely that. It is a full-time job, with no vacation. It has its small daily rewards, though, and this is why he sticks with it.

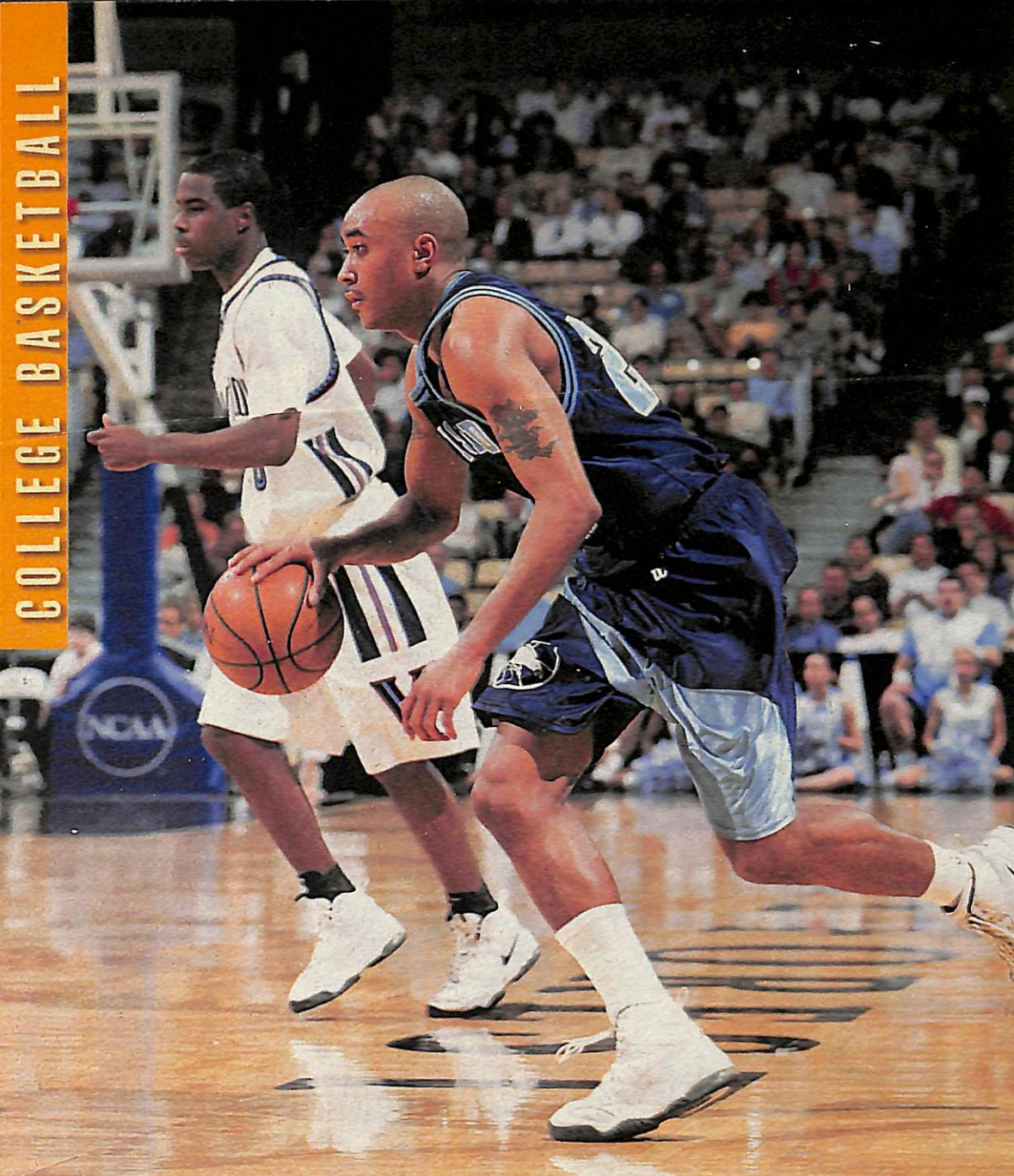
If he's not Richie Parker any longer, Richie Parker cannot be redeemed.

**T**he Schwartz Athletic Center is being spit-shined with some of the money earned through last year's unexpected trip to the NCAA Tournament. "We got the new lights up," athletic director John Suarez says to Parker near the elevator. "What'd you think?"

PHOTOS BY ROBERT SEALE







**SECOND CHANCE:** Going to LIU has paid off for Parker. Not only is he staying out of trouble, he's helping the team win big games. Last season, Parker guided LIU to its first NCAA Tournament birth since 1984.

The new lighting makes it easier to see this is perhaps the oddest home court for any Division I basketball team, a reconfigured theater with a basketball court stuffed inside. Frank Sinatra played here, when it was the Brooklyn Paramount. Now, Blackbirds star guard Charles Jones practices his wicked witchcraft on the same stage. "It's a great place to play," Jones says, "louder than anywhere we go." But not for another week, when the work is done.

There will be no ball today, so the only run for the Blackbirds comes through preseason conditioning. A training run for the Blackbirds travels down Adams Street, over the Brooklyn Bridge and back. Five miles, more or less. The bridge looks great in car commercials and Woody Allen movies, but it's not likely coach Ray Haskins is going to make this part of the recruiting pitch. Players at other schools head for the track—indoor or outdoor, depending on the weather—but such luxuries do not exist at LIU. This is Division I basketball, but not the big time.

"I'm glad it worked out like this," says Parker, a 6-5 sophomore averaging better than 20 points per game. "I'm glad I came to LIU. I feel like I'm making the best of it. I won a college conference championship, I got to the NCAA. We got the

school recognized, made coach happy, made my teammates happy. I feel like this is the best a college player could achieve."

To say Parker is different than expected understates the case. He is relentlessly polite. LIU sports information director Greg Fox promises Parker will be 10 minutes early for a 3 p.m. appointment. Parker walks in at 2:48. He could not be more helpful to someone writing his story if he sat behind the word processor and pounded out the copy, even though he knows he will be asked again about his conviction and that it again will appear in print.

But more than that, there is the absence of distance. Parker does not waste time trying to figure out if someone is worth liking before he gives it a chance. Coaches who dabbled in his recruitment or pursued him ardently, even those who've competed against Parker, have only compliments for him—men like Utah's Rick Majerus and Fran Fraschilla of St. John's.

"Richie has never had a problem with liking anyone," says his mother, Rosita Parker. "He doesn't carry anger around. That's the way I always brought my kids up. I guess a lot of people are looking for him to be angry, but he's not that type of person."

With rounded features and eyelids that droop by a quarter, Parker's face has a quality that suggests the hardness has been worn away by experience, rather than reinforced. He shaves his scalp, but it does not toughen his look in the same way as his hero, Michael Jordan.

Parker does not smile aggressively, trying to brighten up a room. He rarely is photographed while smiling, as though he wants to assure everyone he understands the consequences of his history.

"I don't like to think about the past. The past is always in the past," he says. "I've just got to go forward with what I have now and plan on the future. Once I go in the past, that's what stops me from going for my goals."

Those who contended Parker's 1995 guilty plea on sexual assault charges should consign him to a life devoid of the college game's glamour—and there were many—have seen the greater part of their demands met. He has competed in some of basketball's finest arenas: Mackey at Purdue, Carver-Hawkeye at Iowa. But always the Blackbirds are there as a high-class rent-a-victim, the home team fully expecting to win and figuring a victory over LIU, a potential conference champion, will mean more to its power rating than one against Sacramento State.

LIU is every bit the city college, not an island of grass and trees like St. John's up the expressway, but a batch of buildings squeezed into several blocks between the subway station, shops and restaurants. What passes for a quad can be covered in fewer than 50 steps. The one squirrel that scampers by seems almost like a prop, installed to prove this is a college campus. Here, privilege is less a part of the package than at Princeton or Penn State.

If he is not to be incarcerated, as the courts have declared in the case of this juvenile, first-time offender, and if he is to continue his pursuit of a basketball career and an education, perhaps this is where Parker needs to be.

"I don't have the same kind of pressure that a John Chaney has at Temple or Jerry Tarkanian has at Fresno State," Haskins says. "All those guys, they thought of Richie, but my job is different. If they recruited Richie Parker, it was supposedly because of winning, to fill the arenas, to increase their visibility and all that. Richie Parker came in, and he was just another player coming here. He has to go somewhere. Why not LIU?"

If Parker were at a Big East school, he most likely would be a part of the guard rotation and a frequent double-figure scorer, though not yet a star. He is getting that at LIU. The plan was to bring in Parker and gently elevate this nondescript Northeast Conference program. The Blackbirds won all of nine games the year before. Haskins had Jones waiting to play after transferring from Rutgers and 6-6 junior college product Mike Campbell as a recruit, but really, who knew?

Who knew Jones would lead the nation in scoring, that LIU would open its season by humbling St. John's and close with a sizzling loss to Villanova in the NCAA Tournament, that the Blackbirds suddenly would become back-page news in the New York tabloids? That always had been Parker's individual domain, and not under the brightest of circumstances.

The facts of Parker's case are simply summarized. It can be done and has been so many times, within the confines of a 200-word, wire-service news story.

Parker was a student at Manhattan Center High when he and a friend cornered a girl in a stairwell and demanded she perform oral sex. One year later, Parker pleaded guilty and was placed on



# Parker rarely is photographed while smiling, as though he wants to assure everyone he understands the consequences of his history.

five years' probation. Soon after, he settled a civil suit with a public apology and pledge that a portion of any future pro basketball earnings would go to his victim.

The young woman has said through her attorney she accepts Parker's apology and is trying to move on.

Those attempting to explain why Parker deserves an opportunity to reclaim his life often refer to this incident as his "mistake." It is an unfortunate use of the language. What Parker did seems not so simple. Parker did a terrible thing, which rightly landed him in the justice system. The courts imposed their punishment, and then the world of athletics had its say. His scholarship offer was revoked by Seton Hall, and when other schools attempted to take its place, the controversy surrounding his recruitment eventually caused them to retreat.

How many schools were there? Parker has long since lost count. Utah, George Washington, Southern California, Oral Roberts and Cal-Fullerton were among them. At nearly all those places, someone—an assistant, a head coach, even a school president—got into trouble for recruiting Parker. No wonder former Memphis coach Larry Finch refused to consider the idea when it was presented to him.

When Parker eventually decided to follow his friend, Karee Anderson, to Mesa Community College in Arizona, merely to find somewhere remote to attend school and play, the controversy forced Mesa coach Rob Standifer to resign. Athletic director Allen Benedict recommended Parker be withheld from competition during the 1995-96 season. The university declared athletes are judged on academic ability, athletic ability and citizenship, and Parker was wanting in the citizenship department.

## The Parker profile

**Vitals:** Long Island University; 6-5, 205; sophomore forward.

**Freshman season:** Parker averaged 16.1 points, 7.6 rebounds and 2.0 steals for LIU, which used him at power forward because of a lack of size in the frontcourt. He was the Northeastern Conference newcomer of the year and second team all-conference.

**Strengths:** Parker plays tough for his size and has a knack for scoring from any position on the court, something that escapes many players his size. Although he plays inside for LIU, Parker is able to lure defenders away from the basket and beat them with an assortment of dribble moves, and he is accurate with his shot even when executing a step-back move or fallaway jumper. In an offensive system that encourages players to shoot when open, he rarely forces a shot. The tricks he learns playing power forward should make him an excellent backcourt rebounder when he returns to his natural shooting guard position. Parker is a fine passer who may have a future as a big point guard.

**Weaknesses:** Parker does not often attempt 3-pointers, which indicates he understands shot selection but also needs work on his range. Parker glides in the air, but isn't explosive. His body could use some retraining to give him an extra step of quickness and a few inches on his vertical leap. For someone who makes as many jumpers as he does, Parker's free-throw shooting is a disaster. His stroke is fine, which means he's not working enough on repetition. —Mike DeCourcy

He was permitted to enroll in school and spent the year just hitting the books. "He went from a boy to a man," says Anderson, who followed Parker to LIU.

Parker's plans for the next school year were uncertain when he first heard LIU might become the latest Division I school to recruit him. It meant the opportunity to return home. Parker met with Haskins, and more important, with Gayle Stevens Haynes, the Brooklyn campus provost who would have to approve his enrollment.

She saw in Parker someone worth a rescue attempt and defended her decision powerfully through the press. In an op-ed piece for *Newsday*, she wrote: "The price of unforgiving, knee-jerk condemnation may well be the sacrifice of individuals we all could be proud to call our students, our friends, our family members."

Haskins did not know Parker well in the spring of 1996. "I had conversations with Ernie Lorch, who I've known for 30 years since I've been in this business," Haskins says. "I saw Ernie one day and said, 'Would Richie be interested?' And he said he thought he would."

"I just felt the time was right for people to say, 'Hey, let's give Richie another chance. It's been a year, you know. What are we going to do, kill him?'"

The score is tied 43-all at the half, doubly good news in the Long Island locker room. Mississippi, LIU's third top 15 opponent, has not been able to shake the Blackbirds nor to establish the controlled pace the Rebels prefer. "This is a good team, undefeated, but they're ready to break," Haskins says. "Keep the pressure there."

The LIU coaches serve almost as a tag-team, Haskins handing off to Julius Allen, who says his piece and then gives way to Joe Palermo. He asks the Blackbirds to focus on the first four minutes of the half, which is when he is convinced the game will be decided. A prescient comment. The Blackbirds score only twice by the 16-minute mark and trail by eight. Eventually, they will lose by a single 3-pointer.

Parker listens to the halftime talk but stares blankly at his coaches' knees. His aunt died a few

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days before. He is so weak with the flu, Haskins has chosen not to start him and keeps him on the bench for all but 18 minutes. Parker is not interested in these excuses, never mind that he scores a season-low 10 points.

Foul trouble, he says. That's what has messed up his night. Basketball stuff that can happen to anyone.

"Nothing comes true without Richie," Jones says, reflecting on the Ole Miss loss, but more so the success of LIU's 1996-97 season. "He's done a lot of little things not many people wanted to do: drawing double-teams, hitting the boards."

Parker was expecting a return to the perimeter this season, but the big guys recruited by Haskins are not yet comfortable with the running game. Parker still plays inside, putting him in proximity to Iowa's Guy Rucker and Ansu Sesay of Ole Miss. But the frenetic, shoot-it-if-you've-got-it approach employed by Haskins allows him to demonstrate his offensive skills. Parker has stepped from his exile into the ultimate basketball freedom.

"If you've got the ball and you feel like it's an open shot and it's a good shot, Coach doesn't mind," Parker says. "I guess it's a lot of fun when you're doing something you like and you're winning. It would be difficult if I came to a team and you're running and gunning and you're losing."

Parker has done Jones and the rest of his teammates a service by playing out of position and giving the Blackbirds a tough, skilled player in the frontcourt. He has attempted only a few 3-pointers, which requires extraordinary on-court discipline given the nature of the system. "I try to blend in with everybody and make everybody happy and don't worry about (how) it's going to benefit me," Parker says.

Jones' favor in return has been permitting Parker to play a meaty supporting role. Parker is closer to simply being a basketball player than at any time in a long time. A year ago, when he traveled to Niagara, he endured a two-hour vilification by opposing fans. In his first game, at St. John's, he went to the free-throw line for two clutch foul shots and heard that "jailbird" taunt knife through a moment's silence. A fan at one school held up a poster of a nude woman and shouted a question: "Rape anybody lately?"

"There were some places that made it rough. Sometimes, the fans, they really want to see their team do well," Jones says. "I guess you can't blame them, but when you think about it, it's like, wow ... the level some people will stoop to trying to get you out of your game."

Jones has this way of disarming hecklers. He puts on an exhibition of offensive basketball so mesmerizing it becomes an effort to notice any other player. There is no open jump shot he is not willing to take nor able to make. The act of bringing along the basketball does not impede his ability to change direction or stop on the spot.

Fans at the Ole Miss-LIU game, part of Ball State's Varsity Club Tournament, want to see Jones score 40 or 50 or however many he can manage. They really only notice Parker a few



**IN THE PAINT:** Parker (right) has been playing inside instead of the perimeter because the big guys on the team are not yet comfortable with the running game.

## The Blackbirds are sneaking onto the stage with some of college basketball's most powerful teams.

times. He scores his first basket with a rock-step that freezes his man at the foul line, then a quick drive down the right side of the lane that finishes with an eight-foot, fadeaway jump shot. Later, he sticks a smooth 18-footer from the left corner, stepping back to create the room to shoot.

In between comes a less obvious piece of basketball acumen. Parker picks up a steal in the press and dribbles into the frontcourt, all the while planning his dunk. When Parker sees a defender's arm flying overhead, he reconsiders and lays the ball over the front of the rim. Solid.

"He just played hard. He played hard, within the scheme of the team concept," says Purdue coach Gene Keady, whose Boilermakers gave up 34 to Parker in the season opener for both teams. "He's a 6-6 player that's hard to guard. He can jump, shoot it, has good ballhandling skills."

"I was watching him, because you're always leery of those people who have a reputation, and I liked him because he just played. There was not a trash-talking type of demeanor. He wasn't hot-dogging it, wasn't trying to prove anything. He was just out there for his team."

**T**he students who share the LIU campus with Richie Parker include those who know and like him, who greet him and chat him up as he rides the elevator to his dorm room, and those who have no idea who Richie Parker might be. LIU's commuter-heavy student

body includes plenty of people who don't follow the Blackbirds.

That is harder than it once was. With their schedule including games against TCU, Hawaii and Fresno State, the Blackbirds are sneaking onto the stage with some of college basketball's most powerful teams. They are favored to return to the NCAA Tournament by winning the NEC.

Richie Parker is an important part of that and is working to ensure he remains so. He achieved a 3.4 grade average his first semester and a 2.7 for his freshman year. On the court, he averages five rebounds and shoots .565 from the floor. The variety in his offensive game and his great size for the guard position suggests a pro career is possible, but he will need to expand his shooting range and retrain his body to become more explosive if he wants a full-time job in the NBA. Which he does. This is how he plans to make a name for himself.

**R**ichie Parker goes out of his way to avoid trouble. When he has spare time, usually out of season, he'll catch the D-train to 5th Avenue, then the C to 110th street. He visits his mother and spends time with his girlfriend, whom he has been dating more than a year.

"I just go hang out with her to get away from college parties or wherever somebody can get somebody in trouble," he says. "I try to avoid all that and get away, go to movies or do something low-key. It's a part of maturity, to know that

partying is not the world. You can do a lot of other things than just going to a college party or hanging out drinking or doing whatever."

The decision on Richie Parker had already been made by Haynes when Suarez accepted his position as the school's athletic director in June 1996. Richie Parker was an LIU athlete, and thus became Suarez's concern.

What Suarez knows, what everybody at LIU knows, is if Richie Parker's name were to be involved in any sort of police matter, perhaps as innocuous as a traffic ticket, the cyclone of controversy could flatten the athletic program. He cannot afford even to be a victim of circumstance.

Suarez used to go home weekends with that on his mind. He knows Richie Parker now. "It's not going to happen," Suarez says. "I can't guarantee it, but there's too many ... between coach Haskins, myself, the provost, there's enough of a support system around here that he knows he is going to let down an awful lot of people if something happens. I don't think Richie is going to let it happen."

"The difference between kids is that some don't recognize a second chance when they are 18 or 19 years old. He recognizes it. He's not like the kids with the attitude, 'Well, I deserve it because I play basketball and I can bring money into the institution.' He knows if he ever screwed up here, there is no other place for him to go."

TSN

Mike DeCourcy covers college basketball for the Cincinnati Enquirer.





Mike DeCourcy

## It's all in the name for Flames, 'Dogs and Racers

**P**erhaps if the average SAT scores were higher at Illinois-Chicago, or if Gonzaga produced more U.S. presidents, or if one year at Murray State cost the same as a three-

bedroom townhouse in the suburbs, one of them might be the school that seems out of place among the powers in the top 25.

Instead, it's Princeton.

Is it because the Tigers are a better basketball team? Because they've accomplished more against better opponents? Or is it because the Princeton name has a high-gloss finish to it and the others do not?

"I think you can feel a little frustrated that they judge you not by your performance but what it says on your jersey," Gonzaga coach Dan Monson says. His team began the season on top of the Top of the World Classic, defeating Tulsa by 38 points, followed by Mississippi State and then a title-game upset of Clemson, ranked No. 5 at the time. But Monson's Bulldogs didn't wind up in the polls.

"Instead they just say, 'Let's see if it's a flash in the pan.' Then we go and lose at the buzzer at Michigan State, and they kind of forget about you."

Poll rankings mean a lot to schools like Gonzaga. A place in the poll can mean a TV game getting tossed their way when schedules are made next summer or an unlikely recruit signing a letter of intent in the spring.

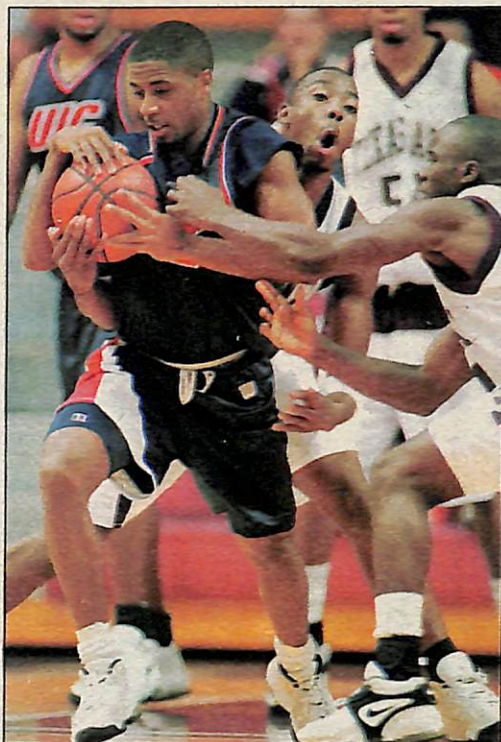
Coaches at mid-major schools try not to think about that, but with Princeton inching higher, they have every right. The Tigers are a wonderful basketball team that plays a fascinating style, but they are getting preferential treatment.

Consider the case for each team:

**Princeton.** Led by guard Brian Earl, a finalist for the John R. Wooden Award, the Tigers started 11-1. They beat Texas, NC State and Wake Forest on neutral courts and won at Rutgers; those teams were 28-16 through Saturday. Princeton generated acclaim for playing a tight game in a loss at top-ranked North Carolina.

**Gonzaga.** The schedule forced the Bulldogs onto the road after the stunning performance in Alaska; each of the losses in an 11-3 start were away from home against major opponents. The Michigan State defeat was by a single basket, and the most damaging loss, against Washington State, was the Bulldogs' seventh game away from home in 14 days.

Their three victims in Alaska had a combined record of 31-11 through Saturday. Power forward Bakari Hendrix leads Gonzaga with 19.1 points per game. Paced by Matt Santangelo and Richie Frahm, the team



**ON FIRE:** Mark Miller and Illinois-Chicago quietly have given a number of major programs problems.

shoots .457 from 3-point range.

"I loved that team on film. They've got a big guy, they've got shooters, they've got a point guard," says Michigan State coach Tom Izzo, whose Spartans have explored this territory well. They lost at UIC.

**Illinois-Chicago.** It took a stunning last-minute

shooting display by Marquette star guard Aaron Hutchins to lift the Golden Eagles and prevent UIC from ruining their unbeaten start.

UIC's only major win was against Michigan State, although you could tack on Illinois State and not get an argument as to its quality. Those two are 15-6 combined. The Flames also lost by a point at Illinois.

"What they've got, and it's a big key, is a lot of veterans—four- and five-year players," Izzo says. "They're athletic and rebound well. And they play aggressive, solid defense."

**Murray State.** With Chad Townsend and De'Teri Mayes continuing the program's impressive run of backcourt stars, the aptly named Racers beat Dayton at UD Arena, hardly an easy place to steal a win. Over Christmas in Puerto Rico, they took down Iowa State and Arkansas after a one-sided, opening-round loss to Michigan, their first of the year.

Murray's three major victims have a 26-13 record.

Coach Mark Gottfried had lobbied since he arrived at Murray to get the Racers into an exempt tournament, but mostly was brushed off. They were invited to Puerto Rico only because Wright State chose to pull out.

"The trip cost us \$40,000," Gottfried says. "That's a pretty good hit for us, but when else do we get to play those teams on a neutral court?"

One thing all four schools have in common, a significant ingredient in their impressive starts, is a refusal to sell themselves exclusively as victims.

"Everybody has to do it a little bit at our level, but we have to be selective," Gottfried says. "You're just not going to have a chance to build your program if you're going out and playing four or five games and getting pounded."

With what Princeton's Tigers have in front of them, it's not out of the question they could arrive in March with a 26-1 record with maybe one win against an NCAA Tournament team. It would be interesting to see how high they'd be ranked in that circumstance, and what the selection committee would do with their seeding.

The other three play in conferences more competitive than the Ivy, which has only one other team over the .500 mark. Unlike the Tigers, who need only to win their regular season to get an automatic NCAA bid, Gonzaga,

Murray State and UIC have to hope their non-league work impresses the committee should they suffer upsets in conference tournaments.

"We've put ourselves in position that if we can continue on, we maybe can force the committee's hand either way," Gottfried says. "Whether we can do that, who knows, because it's awfully difficult to go through your league and lose only one or two."

"We feel like we deserve some recognition. Who knows how much?" **TSN**

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## Wooden image

The same people who tried to sell you Duke's Steve Wojciechowski as one of the nation's top 50 players during the preseason now insist none of the 30 best players is a freshman. The steering committee for the John R. Wooden Award is on a heck of a streak.

Wojciechowski, mercifully, was not included on the Wooden Award's midseason list of 30 finalists for its player of the year honor. But Kentucky's Jeff Sheppard was, despite averaging less than 12 points. Center Michael Doleac made the list for solid, but unspectacular contributions to Utah's unbeaten start.

Nowhere to be found, though, were such dazzling rookies as Ohio State's Michael Redd, Georgia Tech's Dion Glover or Larry Hughes of Saint Louis, each averaging in the 20-point neighborhood.

Versatile guard Khalid El-Amin, with 16.3 points and 4.6 assists per game, has been nearly as important to Connecticut as high-scoring small forward Richard Hamilton. Duke center Elton Brand deserved mention despite his season-ending foot injury.

With so few gifted players staying in school long enough to play as seniors, it's foolish not to recognize the contributions they make as rookies. There may not be another chance.



## TSN's Power Poll Women

Rk.	Team (last week)	W-L	Comment
1.	Tennessee (1)	15-0	Holdsclaw gets 25 pts., 6 stls., 5 rebs., 4 assts. vs. UConn.
2.	Old Dominion (2)	10-0	Eblin and Roberts lead comeback from 18 down vs. Texas Tech.
3.	Connecticut (3)	12-1	Freshman Svetlana Abrosimova surprises Vols with 14 points.
4.	Louisiana Tech (4)	10-2	Alisa Burras comes alive as Techsters push win streak to six.
5.	Texas Tech (6)	8-2	Alicia Thompson scores 39 in final 29 minutes vs. Missouri.
6.	Vanderbilt (7)	11-1	SEC showdown with No. 20 Auburn comes Sunday.
7.	North Carolina (5)	11-2	Brown slowed by wrist injury; Teasley eases back in.
8.	Virginia (8)	10-1	Walker a quick healer: 21 points, record eight blocks vs. FSU.
9.	Washington (9)	10-0	Winning by an average of 13.2 points per game.
10.	Arizona (10)	8-2	Meets Washington Saturday, Stanford Monday.
11.	Stanford (11)	5-4	Heads to Cal with a 47-game Pac-10 win streak.
12.	Illinois (12)	9-4	3-0 Big Ten start a huge boost after losing three straight in Dec.
13.	Nebraska (14)	11-3	Colorado, fresh off 40-point loss to Illinois, comes Wednesday.
14.	SW Missouri (16)	11-0	G Shannon Gage could return from ACL injury by month's end.
15.	Wisconsin (15)	10-3	Responded to Illinois loss by beating Georgia on road in OT.
16.	Georgia (13)	9-3	Leads SEC in 3-point accuracy (39 percent).
17.	NC State (17)	12-1	Chasity Melvin has five double-doubles.
18.	West. Kentucky (18)	11-3	Headed to up-and-down Wisconsin on Sunday.
19.	Purdue (19)	8-4	White reaches 1,000 points vs. Illinois, scores 28 vs. Mich. St.
20.	Auburn (20)	11-1	Outshooting opponents 49 percent to 35 percent from the field.
21.	Florida (22)	10-3	Heads to undefeated, untouched Tennessee Saturday.
22.	Florida Int'l (23)	11-0	Off to best start in school history.
23.	Utah (25)	11-0	Has given up more than 58 points only once.
24.	Stephen F. Austin (24)	9-2	Anitra Davis scores 32 in win over Texas-Arlington.
25.	Tulane (—)	9-2	Three of next four on road: at UAB, Memphis, Marquette.

Dropped out: No. 21 Colorado (6-4).

The TSN Power Poll is determined by columnists Michelle Smith and Lori Riley and TSN editors. Records are through last Sunday.

## TSN's Power Poll Men

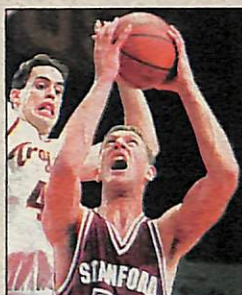
Rk.	Team (last week)	W-L	Comment
1.	North Carolina (1)	15-0	Just four more weeks until Duke comes to town on Feb. 5.
2.	Duke (3)	12-1	Devils hit 11-of-19 3s, 16-of-17 free throws in first half vs. Md.
3.	Kansas (2)	17-2	Newcomers Chenoweth, Gregory and Earl all contributing.
4.	Utah (4)	12-0	Best start since 1943-44, when they won an NCAA title.
5.	Kentucky (7)	12-2	Outrebounded Vanderbilt 57-18. (Yes, you read that right.)
6.	Stanford (6)	12-0	Montgomery has them convinced that defense is the way to go.
7.	Connecticut (10)	13-1	Don't forget the inside game of Voskuhl, Wane and Klaiber.
8.	Arizona (8)	10-3	For first time in four years the Pac-10 title may not go to UCLA.
9.	Purdue (5)	12-3	Heads to Houston for an unusual Big Ten/C-USA matchup.
10.	UCLA (11)	9-2	In his second game back, McCoy logs 16 pts., 13 rebs. vs. Ariz.
11.	New Mexico (14)	10-1	35 straight home wins second only to Kansas' 53 as of Monday.
12.	Florida State (13)	12-2	JC transfer Terrell Baker lights it up vs. NC State.
13.	Iowa (17)	13-1	Rucker is one of many go-to "Guys" on balanced team.
14.	Mississippi (16)	10-1	Sesay what? Ansu and the Rebels blow by the Gamecocks.
15.	South Carolina (9)	8-2	As Rebels showed, the key is to contain McKie and Watson.
16.	Xavier (12)	8-3	X-Men were less-than-super in A-10 opening loss to Bonnies.
17.	Michigan (24)	12-3	Similar to football, Wolverines treat Nittany Lions like 11th team in Big Ten.
18.	Arkansas (15)	11-2	If they keep playing like this, Clinton will come to more games.
19.	Marquette (22)	10-0	Could Al McGuire be dancing with his former team in March?
20.	Syracuse (25)	12-1	The Orange squeezed by Rutgers thanks to Burgan, Janulis.
21.	Princeton (18)	11-1	The Tigers can no longer sneak in through the back door.
22.	Clemson (19)	10-4	Despite Buckner's 30 pts., UNC wins No. 103 in 118 matchups.
23.	Rhode Island (—)	8-2	Look out UCLA, Harrick's new team is only 13 spots behind you.
24.	West Virginia (23)	12-2	Pledger and Owens repel Mountaineers' opponents.
25.	Oklahoma St. (—)	11-0	One of seven teams undefeated entering the week.

Dropped out: No. 20 Maryland (7-5), No. 21 Temple (6-4).

The TSN Power Poll is determined by columnist Mike DeCourcy and TSN editors.

### INSIDE THE TOP 25 Stanford

Very big, very deep and very solid on defense, Stanford, led by coach Mike Montgomery, is off to its best ranking in 35 years. The loss of power forward Mark Madsen, who will miss a month with a stress fracture, could pose problems for a team that tends to struggle on the road and has no senior starters. But Tim Young will get plenty of help down low in Peter Van Elswyk, Mark Seaton and Jarron Collins. Jason Collins returns after December knee surgery. And Arthur Lee has made a solid move to the point in place of Brevin Knight.



YOUNG: Anchors a solid frontcourt attack.

## inside dish

CAMPUS  
RUMBLINGS  
AND LOCKER  
ROOM  
WHISPERS

It was hard to come to terms with the idea of Purdue as a pressing team unless you were playing against them—which is why they no longer are a pressing team. Michigan State attacked the press mercilessly in a 17-point win at Mackey Arena after Xavier and Providence showed the way in close losses. The three averaged only 15 turnovers. Purdue now is back to stressing halfcourt man-to-man, although the experience with the press could help down the road. ... Shooting guard **Glendon Alexander**, not exceptionally quick or explosive, was somewhat miscast in Arkansas' up-tempo system. He should fit better at Oklahoma State come next December. But Alexander's haste to leave a contributing role on a Top 25 team will cost him time he could have used to develop his game. ... DePaul is among the schools trying to reel in guard **Ed Sheffey**, who's in the transfer market after averaging 8.7 points and 3.5 assists as a Georgetown freshman. ... Before the start of league play, Conference USA did not have a winning record against any of the other eight major



CONSISTENT 'CAT: Mohammed's reliability led to a starting role.

conferences and was 19-37 against them. ... With **Jelani McCoy's** suspension over, **J.R. Henderson's** stand-in performance as UCLA's center gradually is ending. But what a glorious run it was. Henderson led the Pac-10 with better than 20 points and nine rebounds a game. ... Following Kentucky's home loss to Louisville, Wildcats coach **Tubby Smith** moved junior center **Nazr Mohammed** into

the lineup and put sophomore **Jamaal Magliore** on the bench. Mohammed is UK's only consistent weapon, and playing him part time didn't take advantage of his reliability. ... Until the Tigers defeated Georgia in their first Southeastern Conference game, Auburn had lost nine straight SEC openers. ... Minnesota's **Sam Jacobson** stopped defining himself as a 3-point shooter and since has been as dangerous as any offensive player in Division I. As he got more aggressive, Jacobson averaged 18 shots in a five-game stretch, only five of those from 3-point range. ... Last spring, Maryland coach **Gary Williams** was looking for a point guard to replace **Terrell Stokes**, whom he didn't trust at the controls of the Terps' offense. Williams didn't find one and benched Stokes in favor of senior **Matt Kovarik**. In his first four games as a reserve, Stokes averaged four assists.



## Women's notes

### Huskies give way to pressure

The black curtains are usually drawn across the top tier of Tennessee's Thompson-Boling Arena, the largest on-campus arena in the country.

But last Saturday, they were pushed aside.

A women's college basketball record crowd of 24,597, 403 short of capacity, came to see the game that annually defines women's basketball: Connecticut vs. Tennessee. Ranked No. 3 and No. 1, respectively. Both undefeated, naturally.

UConn left the game much as Tennessee did a year ago—crushed—with an 84-69 loss, yet taking some comfort in that it's only January. After all, Connecticut won the last two regular-season matchups by a combined 21 points, only to fall to Tennessee in the NCAA Tournament.

But after becoming the sixth ranked team to fall to Tennessee (15-0) this season, UConn couldn't find much solace. March is a distant thought.

"Sometimes, these games take on an eerie appearance," UConn coach Geno Auriemma says. "If you lose, it's like you will not win another game. ... So much is attached to this game."

If the teams meet again, UConn must find a way to handle Tennessee's swarming, trapping halfcourt defense. The Huskies simply don't have enough players who are comfortable handling the ball. Rita Williams, the 5-7 point guard, looked very small and alone in the backcourt. UConn All-American Nykesha Sales, who hit 10-of-10 shots against Notre Dame and had a career-high 46 points against Stanford, had only 12 points—and six of those came in the final 45 seconds. UConn was outbounded by the smaller Volunteers, 41-28, and had a season-high 27 turnovers.

At this point, it is uncertain whether guard/forward

Shea Ralph will come back from her preseason knee surgery. Junior college guard Tihana Abrlic is out with a foot injury and isn't ready to handle that type of pressure. Neither are the other reserves. And the Huskies' recruiting class, which includes highly rated guards Sue Bird and Keirsten Walters, is a year away.

Still, Auriemma was at least pleased his team rallied from a 10-0 deficit to within 49-48 in the third quarter by slowing the pace and executing the offense.

"This isn't college football, you know, when you lose one game, and then you're going to the Arm & Hammer Bowl, or whatever," he says. "I just hope we don't play them again until the championship game."



**VOLATILE:** Kyra Elzy (center) and Tennessee simply stifled Sales (right) and the Huskies.

### Well-healed

Iowa guard/forward Angela Hamblin didn't want to make the same mistake again. She could have played against Vanderbilt in the Elite 4 Classic last month but opted to let her hamstring heal completely.

Hamblin, a 6-0 senior, suffered a bad hamstring pull in the preseason. She sat out an 83-57 loss to Arkansas in November, then came back too quickly for a game against Connecticut.

Hamblin inspired her team, producing 11 points and seven rebounds in 19 minutes, but Iowa still lost and she had to sit out the next five games because of new damage. She's back now.

"We're beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel with injuries," coach Angie Lee says. "But it still doesn't mean it's tasteful to us to lose these games."

With Hamblin back, the Hawkeyes should get back on track in the Big Ten. But the clock is ticking for a team that has yet to meet expectations after bringing in one of 1994's top recruiting classes. —Lori Riley

## The 700 Club

With the addition of Texas-El Paso's Don Haskins, 10 Division I coaches have reached the 700-victory plateau.

Haskins, perhaps best known for coaching what was then called Texas Western and its all-black starting lineup to the 1966 NCAA title against Adolph Rupp's all-white Kentucky squad, followed Norm Stewart into the circle by less than two weeks when UTEP upset undefeated SMU last Saturday. Missouri's victory over Illinois on December 23 gave Stewart the mark.

Both did it in their 37th season. Making it more noteworthy are the health problems both have overcome.

Haskins, 67, suffered a heart attack two Januarys ago and underwent triple bypass surgery three days later. He was back on the bench a year later and could have a NCAA Tournament dark-horse candidate this season after the upset of SMU.

Stewart, 62, was diagnosed with colon cancer during the 1988-89 season and missed the final 14 games, but he also was back the next season.

So who's next in line for the 700 mark? Lefty Driesell at Georgia State has 686 victories (through Sunday). And Jerry Tarkanian, in only 26 seasons, has 673 wins.

#### THE CLUB

1. Dean Smith, North Carolina	879
2. Adolph Rupp, Kentucky	876
3. x-Jim Phelan, Mount St. Mary's	776
4. Henry Iba, Oklahoma State	767
5. Ed Diddle, Western Kentucky	759
6. Phog Allen, Kansas	746
7. Ray Meyer, DePaul	724
8. x-Bob Knight, Indiana	709
9. x-Norm Stewart, Missouri	701
10. x-Don Haskins, Texas-El Paso	700

x-active (record through Sunday)

## Coaches corner:

### WHICH RECRUITING RULES SHOULD BE RELAXED?



#### Lefty Driesell, Georgia State:

"Go back to the old rules! Visit recruits 365 days a year! The present rules favor established programs. There's no attempt at parity."



#### Kelvin Sampson, Oklahoma:

"We need more than one phone call per week. It is very difficult to establish a relationship, to get to know a student athlete and his family

with only one call. A better job of enforcing current rules would be a positive step."



#### Elaine Elliott, Utah women:

"The rules have brought sanity to an often insane process. There are certainly some small, inane rules. But, in general, they allow coaches to be able to do things

other than recruit 12 months a year."

## Games to watch

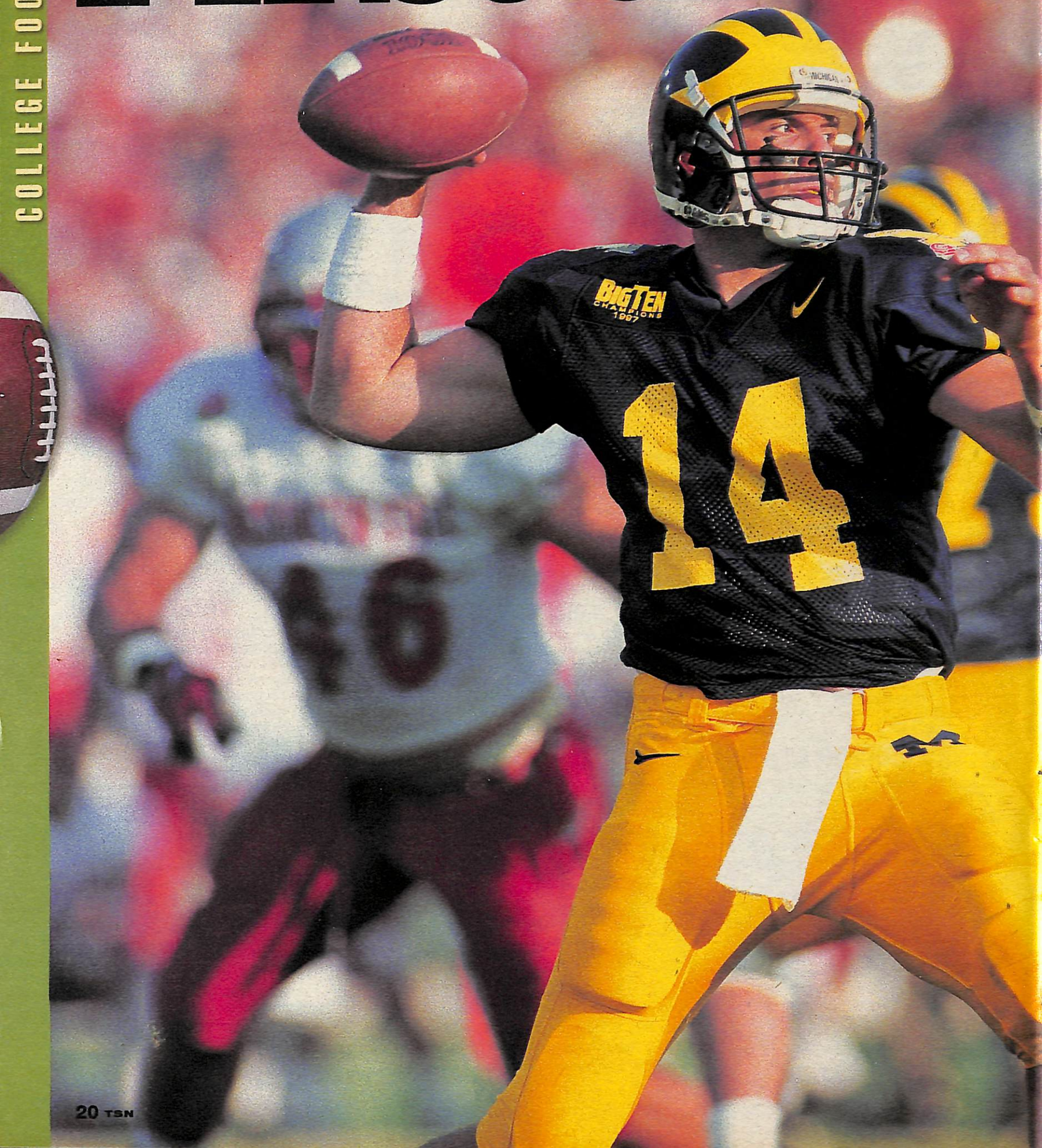
**SOUTH CAROLINA AT KENTUCKY, 9:30 P.M. ET TUESDAY, ESPN:** The arrival of forward LeRon Williams should help the Gamecocks, who swept Kentucky last year but have struggled of late with too much dependency on the backcourt of BJ McKie and Melvin Watson. If Watson is still troubled by a knee sprain, Kentucky's press could take a toll.

**DUKE AT FLORIDA STATE, 7:30 P.M. ET SATURDAY, ESPN2:** This will be a true test of how well Duke's frontcourt can hold up with the loss of Elton Brand. Chris Burgess got off to a good start in Brand's place, but the surprising Seminoles, whose only losses are to Kansas and North Carolina, have a shot because of the blocking/rebounding machine of Corey Louis and Randell Jackson. Terrell Baker can be potent.

**MARQUETTE AT CINCINNATI, 9:30 P.M. ET SUNDAY, ESPN2:** UC is not as strong as years past in the post, and Marquette's 6-10 Jarrod Lovette and 6-11 Richard Shaw have limited opponent's shooting to 40 percent. UM's backcourt also gets the edge with Aaron Hutchins and Marcus West, but don't doubt UC at home.



# First and





# foremost

## With Brian Griese producing a dream game and Michigan's defense operating in full attack mode, everything comes up Roses for the Wolverines **By Tom Dienhart**

**T**he door to the Michigan locker room flew open and out stepped Bob and Brian Griese. Few noticed the great father-son quarterbacking duo walking in the shadows of the Rose Bowl's south end zone concourse because they had exited from an auxiliary door. All of the hangers-on, loved ones wearing replica jerseys and guys sporting school bus-yellow "Event Staff" jackets were clustered at the main door, a short slant pass down the concourse. That allowed the Grieses unobstructed access to the media room.

As Brian walked to the dais and took a seat bathed in light, Bob strode to the anonymity of a corner. This was Brian's moment. Mr. Perfect had had his day. In fact, he had many, including that 17-0 run to Super Bowl glory during the 1972 season with the Miami Dolphins. Bob had even won a Rose Bowl while quarterbacking Purdue after the 1966 season, leading the Boilermakers to a 14-13 triumph over USC. No one had forgotten about him, thanks to the high profile he has maintained as a color commentator for college football games on ABC. His son, the player he refers to as "Brian" instead of the normal "Griese" during telecasts, was putting an exclamation point on his career and sucking in the scene of a 21-16 Rose Bowl triumph over Washington State—a victory that completed Michigan's improbable 12-0 season and earned the Wolverines the 1997 national championship.

But before playing the role of proud pop, Bob pulled out a camera, the envelope-sized variety your dad probably used to capture your first day of kindergarten, and froze the moment for his scrapbook. When he wakes up one day and wonders if the greatest performance of Brian's career was reality or a dream, he always can whip out the picture and know for sure.

That was Brian answering questions in Pasadena, and his numbers on the stat sheet weren't bogus: 18-for-30 passing for 251 yards. Bob raised his eyebrows and nodded approvingly. Three touchdown passes and only one interception. He allowed a tight smile to cross his thin lips as he neatly creased the stat sheet in half vertically, then horizontally, before sticking it into his back pocket. This was another scrapbook keeper. But, best of all was the knowledge Brian had delivered a victory in the

biggest game in a half-century of Michigan football.

This was especially sweet because Brian was supposed to be the team's weak link. Brian had waffled on returning for his fifth season of eligibility, but acquiesced when an older brother told him there is no reason to race off to the bump and grind of the workaday world. And Bob told Brian he would be upset forever if Michigan had a memorable year, a Rose Bowl year, and he wasn't part of it.

"This is just absolutely incredible," said Bob, whose relationship with Brian has grown stronger since the death of his wife,

Judith Ann, of breast cancer in 1988. "It's an amazing story. It couldn't have been scripted any better.

"The frustration Brian felt when he almost quit a year ago, then to come back and now this. I'd hate to think how he would have felt if he hadn't come back and hadn't been a part of all this. This is just unbelievable."

Aside from quarterbacking the Wolverines to a couple victories over Ohio State, including a 13-9 1996 triumph in Columbus that trashed the Buckeyes' perfect season and national title hopes, and starting in the 1997 Outback Bowl, Griese had given little notice that he was about to embark on a season that would generate All-Big Ten honors and culminate with a Rose Bowl MVP performance. He had been valuable for his pooch-punting skills and famous because of his father.

Griese had a weak arm and was slow, which is why he came to Ann Arbor from tiny Miami (Fla.) Columbus High as a walk-on. How could a quarterback with 10 career starts, a guy who had to battle Scott Dreisbach for the starting job right up to the start of the season, end up leading Michigan out of a funk in which the Wolverines had lost four games in four consecutive seasons?

Michigan hadn't won a Big Ten title since 1992. National champi-

onship glory was more distant. As Michigan fans stuck out their chests and shouted "The Victors," the dust was wiped away from the 1948 national title trophy—the last in school history. Now Wolverines fans know the nation has to hail Michigan—and they have Brian Griese to thank.

"I've been waiting for this for years," said John Ghindia, who was standing on the soggy Rose Bowl turf wearing a 1998 national championship hat and shiny, stiff, freshly printed T-shirt making the same proclamation. It was appropriate that Ghindia should soak up some of the glory because he was a reserve quarterback on a 1947 Michigan team that defeated USC, 49-0, in the Rose Bowl and was voted No. 1 in an unprecedented



**BRIAN'S SWAN SONG:** *Rekindling memories of his famous father, Griese (left photo) delivered a couple of surprisingly long touchdowns to Streets (86).*

ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

ALBERT DICKSON / TSN



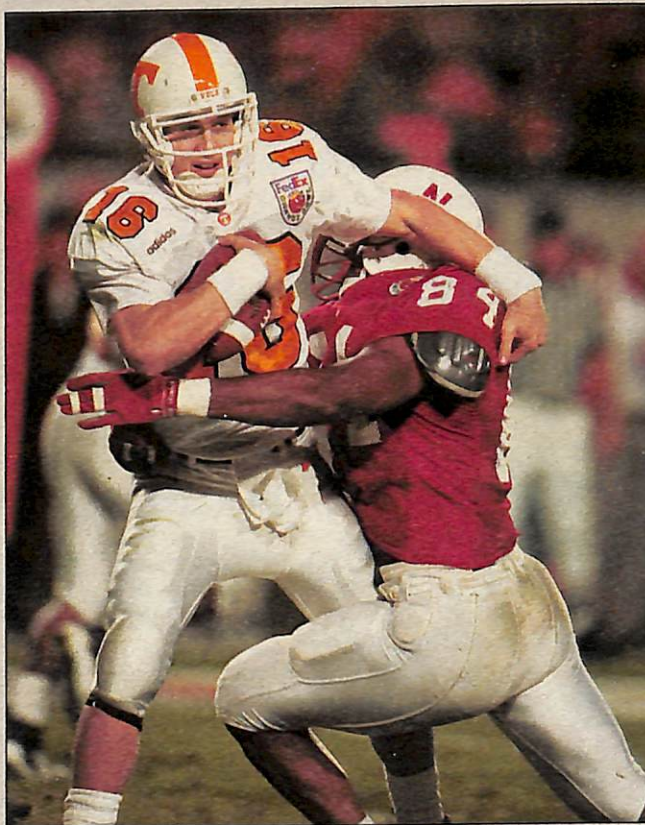
AP post-bowl poll—even though Notre Dame was listed as the “official” national champion. Ghindia and some former teammates who were celebrating the 50th anniversary of their glory year might have been part of the most talented team in school history. Griesse was not. But it doesn't matter—Griesse and the rest of the 1997 Wolverines are champions, too.

“I’ve been through so much,” Griesse said. “Winning this game was my ultimate goal. To be named MVP was something I never expected. It’s something kids always dream of. I was happy all year that I could just contribute to the team. I just wanted to be part of this team, and by the end of this year, I was that.”

The 84th Rose Bowl, the final Granddaddy of all bowls that had guaranteed a Big Ten/Pac-10 matchup before it joined the Sugar, Fiesta and Orange bowls in a “Super Alliance” that begins next season, was supposed to hinge on the battle between Washington State’s offense, led by timber-tall and cedar-strong quarterback Ryan Leaf, and Michigan’s defense, paced by Heisman Trophy-winning cornerback Charles Woodson.

No one paid the \$500 that some scalpers were charging to see Brian Griesse throw bootleg passes to the tight end and flat passes to running backs. The Wolverines’ offense makes guys like Leaf cry. It’s a hand-off, hand-off, pass kind of attack that’s as frozen in time as those winged Michigan helmets, but it’s an attack that can work if executed with precision. Like his father, Brian Griesse knows about exactness and is renowned and hailed for

## It wasn't Peyton's place



**GOING DOWN:** After the Huskers wrapped up Manning and the Vols in the Orange Bowl, they lobbied for a share of the title pie.

Peyton Manning's final game as a collegian wasn't one he'll remember fondly. His Tennessee team fell to Nebraska, 42-17, in the Orange Bowl.

And Manning never really got a chance to go out in a blaze of glory. He finished 21-for-31 but netted only 134 yards, a piddling 6.2 per completion (he had averaged 13.3 per completion in the regular season). Manning had only one completion longer than 13 yards, and he certainly won't remember his final quarter as a Vol: He was 3-for-5 for 1 yard—yes, 1 yard—before finally sitting down with 4:24 remaining.

Vols coach Phil Fulmer said the game plan was for a lot of short drops and quick throws because “we didn’t want Peyton hit a whole bunch.” But Nebraska defensive coordinator Charlie McBride expressed surprise at Tennessee’s reluctance to throw deep: “I don’t know why they didn’t (throw deep). ... We’re so young in the secondary, I was scared to death. By not going deep, they saved our tail. I was glad.” —Mike Huguenin

## Retro is in, and the Wolverines celebrated with some 1970s-style offense.

taking the smart, safe path instead of going for the dangerous big play. But, ironically, it was Griesse’s ability to make the big play with his butter-soft arm that keyed Michigan to its Rose Bowl win.

“A lot of people think Brian Griesse can’t throw the ball,” Michigan coach Lloyd Carr said. “If I were coaching in the NFL, I would take Brian Griesse in a heartbeat.”

Sundays might never come for Griesse, but he’s definitely a Saturday hero and now a part of Michigan lore. Griesse surprised Washington State—and the nation—by throwing downfield often out of a formation called “Play-action Nebraska,” which features Griesse bootlegging right as two wideouts streak down the left sideline and tight end Jerame Tuman crosses from left to right. Former coach Gary Moeller installed the formation, of which Michigan has many variations. Still, few expected 60-yard touchdown passes. Entering the Rose Bowl, Griesse had thrown one pass for more than 50 yards this season, and he had connected for three TD passes in a game once.

His first strike came midway through the second quarter. Griesse found wideout Tai Streets, who became a primary target in this game only because the finger injuries that had badgered him all season were healed, streaking down the right sideline and Streets hauled in a 53-yard touchdown reception.

That allowed Michigan to tie Washington State, 7-7. It was important because the Wolverines did not want to incur a big deficit; their offense had not shown a quick-strike ability all season. But it probably wouldn’t have mattered on this day, not with the way Griesse would play.

After the Cougars took a 13-7 lead when

wideout Shawn Tims ran 14 yards on an end-around with 8:33 remaining in the third quarter, Griesse unwrapped another big-play surprise. Less than four minutes later, he hit a racing Streets, who finished with four catches for 127 yards and two TDs, along the left sideline for a 58-yard touchdown. Kraig Baker’s extra point gave Michigan a 14-13 edge that was made possible by linebacker James Hall’s block of a point-after attempt following Tims’ score. It was the Wolverines’ first lead of the game—an edge they wouldn’t relinquish. Now, with the lead that’s so critical to Michigan’s pedestrian style of play, Griesse could reassume the supporting role he had played so well in 1997, en route to completing 175-of-277 passes for 2,042 yards and 14 TDs.

The Wolverines made Bo Schembechler proud for the rest of the game as they pounded three yards at a time and converted critical third down after critical third down in a clock-draining fourth-quarter drive. Retro is in, and the Wolverines celebrated with some 1970s-style offense. After Griesse flashed one more big play, this one a 23-yard TD toss to Tuman with 11:21 remaining in the fourth quarter, and the Cougars countered with a 48-yard field goal by Rian Lindell, Michigan took over with 7:25 left to play and the Wolverines converted four third downs.

## TSN's Power Poll

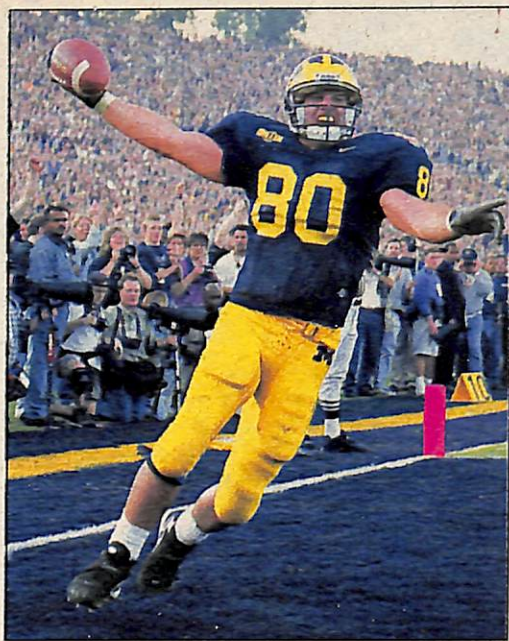
FINAL

Rk.	Team (last rank)	W-L	Comment
1.	Michigan (1)	12-0	Wolverines win Big Ten's first title since Ohio State in '68.
2.	Nebraska (2)	13-0	Ahman Green <i>still</i> has yet to be tackled by Vols.
3.	Florida State (5)	11-1	But for a trip to Gainesville, Seminoles might have been No. 1.
4.	UCLA (4)	10-2	Holy Toledo: Bruins had to struggle past Aggies in Cotton.
5.	Florida (6)	10-2	Defense did the job all season as offense sputtered at times.
6.	Tennessee (3)	11-2	Hey, Phil: You should've let Peyton throw a few deep balls.
7.	Washington State (7)	10-2	Gee, that was an awful quick two seconds, wasn't it?
8.	North Carolina (8)	11-1	11 wins—and none against a team in the Top 25.
9.	Kansas State (10)	11-1	Snyder wants more respect? Hey, Bill, play somebody!
10.	Ohio State (9)	10-3	We're still waiting for OSU offensive line to block a Seminole.
11.	Georgia (13)	10-2	Can 'Dogs overcome loss of numerous offensive weapons?
12.	Auburn (12)	10-3	Craig is departing—and so is almost all of Tigers' offense.
13.	Penn State (11)	9-3	Reason Enis wore that suit? He was tired of dull uniforms.
14.	Colorado State (14)	11-2	Rams appear to be good bet to repeat as WAC champion.
15.	Arizona State (16)	9-3	Sun Devils should be offensive powerhouse next season.
16.	LSU (17)	9-3	Next season shaping up to be a good one down on the bayou.
17.	Washington (18)	8-4	Huskies need Huard to return to be legit Pac-10 contenders.
18.	Purdue (19)	9-3	Tiller's passing attack brought some excitement to staid Big Ten.
19.	Southern Miss (21)	9-3	The best team in Mississippi? It's the Golden Eagles.
20.	Mississippi (—)	8-4	Tuberville has done a masterful job in three years at Oxford.
21.	Syracuse (15)	9-4	"Best in Big East" akin to being opening band for Air Supply.
22.	Missouri (20)	7-5	Tigers need to develop a more consistent passing attack.
23.	Texas A&M (22)	9-4	Aggies look as if they'll be class of Big 12 South next season.
24.	Mississippi State (—)	7-4	Jackie Sherrill's Bulldogs were best team not in a bowl.
25.	Marshall (—)	10-3	Herd proved they belonged in first season in Division I-A.

Dropped out: Oklahoma State (23rd), Air Force (24th), Michigan State (25th).

The TSN Power Poll is determined by TSN editors. For the complete 112-team Division I-A poll, visit our website at [www.sportingnews.com](http://www.sportingnews.com) or our AOL site (keyword:TSN).





ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

**THAT'S A WINNER:** Tuman's 23-yard TD catch sealed the victory and Michigan's national title.

That was a nice contrast to their 0-for-5 third-down performance in the first half. The big, aggressive and strong Cougars line had posed problems for Michigan's young offensive front early, holding the Wolverines to a 2.8-yard average on first down—a major reason the Wolverines averaged a minus-2.8 yards on third down. Michigan was predictable, which allowed a suspect Washington State defense to gun for Griese and limit the running game to 21 yards on 15 first-half rushes.

But the Cougars' offense failed to take advantage of the defense's unexpectedly stout play. Several dropped passes killed drives and Leaf had a pass intercepted in the end zone by Mr. Heisman. That allowed Michigan to regroup at halftime and stick to its trademark brand of Midwestern-bland football—with a splash of flashy Pac-10 passing. The kind of passing Leaf excels at, the kind that almost cost Michigan a victory.

Throughout the season, Leaf had established a legend that he had to live up to. So when Michigan's fourth-quarter, third-down magic ended with a Jay Feely pooch punt that gave the Cougars the ball with 29 seconds remaining, Leaf made things happen from his 7-yard line. After two incompletions, Leaf hit Nian Taylor along the right sideline to Michigan's 47. Leaf then found Love Jefferson at the 41, and Jefferson lateraled to Jason Clayton, who ran 18 more yards before being tackled at the 26. The clock, which would start once the first-down markers were moved, showed two seconds remaining. Desperate, possessing no timeouts and facing a five-point deficit, Leaf lined up his team and spiked the ball in hopes of stopping the clock for one last play. He didn't spike it quickly enough, however, as the clock and game expired on a Washington State team that was playing in the school's first Rose Bowl since the 1930 season.

"With two seconds, I think you can down the

ball," Washington State coach Mike Price said. "I thought it was an official's mistake. We thought about throwing the ball but thought we had two seconds."

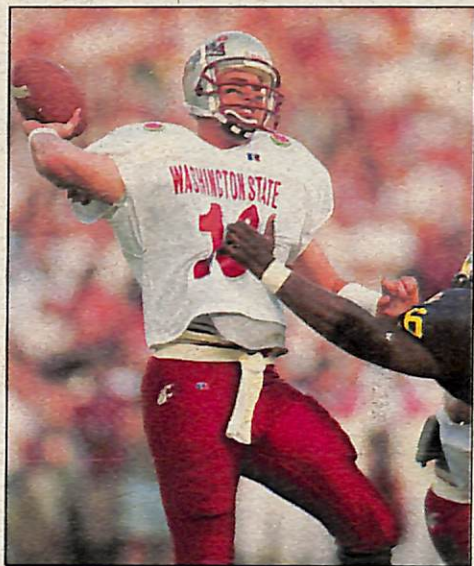
It was a difficult way for Price and the Cougars to end a 10-2 season. Washington State was hampered by a calf injury to tailback Michael Black in the first quarter. He tried to return in the second half, but the 1,235-yard rusher was ineffective and finished with 24 yards on seven carries. Without Black's running or ability to pick up charging blitzers, Leaf was sacked four times, hurried often and forced to make bad throws while directing a one-dimensional attack.

"The best defense is a good pass rush," said Leaf, whose job was complicated by several dropped passes in the first half. "They did a good job with the zone blitz."

Leaf threw for 331 yards but completed only 17-of-35 passes with a touchdown and interception. He was unable to lead the Cougars into the end zone over the final 21:27 of the game. The news got worse for Wazzu the next day when Leaf announced he was leaving Pullman for the NFL with a year of eligibility remaining.

"As a team, we had to get pressure on him and not let him sit back in the pocket and pick us apart," Woodson said.

Mission accomplished for Woodson, who displayed the flair that made him the first primarily defensive player to win a Heisman. Aside from his crucial second-quarter interception in the end zone that prevented Washington State from taking a 14-0 lead, Woodson frequently harassed Leaf as a blitz. And during the time-consuming fourth-quarter drive, Woodson converted two of Michigan's four third-down situations. He ran eight yards after catching a lateral to get one first down and



ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

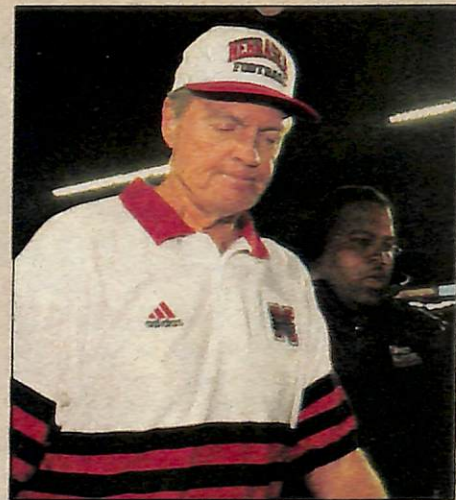
**DISARMING:** Leaf delivered 331 passing yards to the Cougars' cause, but it wasn't enough.

nabbed a seven-yard pass to get another. Those are the kinds of plays the nation's best player, playing on the nation's best team, makes.

"National champs, no doubt," Woodson said. "This season, no one gave us a chance to even be in the Rose Bowl or have a shot at the national championship. We all felt we could go undefeated; it was just a matter of going out and doing it."

**F**or Michigan to earn the Big Ten's first national crown since Jim Stillwagon and Rex Kern led Ohio State to the summit during the 1968 season, Carr had to push all the right buttons. The man maligned for the Wolverines' four-year malaise, the man many criticized as being too *Michigan*, kept the Wolverines focused week to week.

Losing focus had become an annual rite from 1993 to '96, when the question was not if Michigan would lay an egg that would end the big talk and expectations that accompany each season in Ann Arbor—but when and against whom. In 1996, it was a 9-3 disaster at Purdue. The 1995 campaign was sullied by a 19-13 home loss to upstart Northwestern. Who could forget the Hail Mary Colorado game of 1994 that resulted in a last-second, 27-26 defeat at Michigan Stadium?



ROBERT SEALE / TSN

**BIG FINALE:** Osborne went out with a bang.

## Going out in style

Tom Osborne stepped onto the field before his final game at 7:33 p.m. His last official act as coach came in the post-Orange Bowl news conference and that ended at 12:32 a.m. In the five hours between, Osborne's Nebraska players presented him with a game to remember.

Osborne's final game in a remarkable 25-year head-coaching career was a 42-17 crunching of Tennessee in the Orange Bowl, a victory that garnered the Huskers a portion of the national title.

As is his wont, Osborne remained stoic and reserved throughout. When he arrived at the podium during postgame interviews, he told reporters: "I don't mean to butt in ahead of the players. They're the guys who did this; I just stood there."

And while most of the players and assistants said the routine was business as usual before, during and after the game, defensive tackle Jason Peter noted that Osborne did one thing out of character: "He was grabbing guys on the sidelines, getting in guys' faces."

Peter said Osborne really got excited before Tennessee's first possession of the second half. The Huskers had just driven 80 yards to a touchdown with their first possession, stretching their lead to 21-3. Peter said Osborne exhorted his defense to "get the ball back" for the offense. It did just that, forcing a three-and-out, and Nebraska marched 73 yards for the score that put away the game.

Appropriately, Nebraska won Osborne's finale behind a devastating ground game that was keyed by tailback Ahman Green, who finished with 206 rushing yards. The Huskers held the ball for 22 plays in the decisive third quarter—good for 233 yards—and the last 20 were runs. Remarkably, the Huskers faced only one third down in the period. "They handed us our butts physically in the third quarter," Tennessee coach Phil Fulmer said.

As well as his team played, Osborne was the center of attention. While he tried to focus his remarks on the game itself, the questions kept coming back to his retirement. He admitted it had been "a very difficult week" and that he was "very aware" of it being his last game. But, according to Osborne and his players, nothing special was done.

Green might have stated it best: "He was poised, as usual. Gave us his usual pep talk (before the game). Just mentioned that this was his last game ... (but that) it was just another game for him, just another game for us." —Mike Huguenin



And fans still have to pinch their nose when the 24-21 home loss to Illinois in 1993 is mentioned.

But the bookish Carr wouldn't let it happen this year. His messages, the ones sprinkled with dashes of the wisdom he has absorbed from the numerous books he reads, hit home: *Believe in yourself. Stay focused on the present. You are Michigan men.*

It also took guts for Carr to let Jim Herrmann run wild with the defense. Carr knows the Michigan way is the conservative way, on offense and defense. He arrived at Ann Arbor in 1980 to coach defensive backs under Schembechler. He was promoted to coordinator in 1987 and molded some outstanding units. But they were typical bend-but-don't-break varieties. Attack schemes were for the fast and furious guys of the South and West. Sure, big plays could be made by attacking, but you were just as likely to get burned. The thinking went: Let's recruit great athletes and let them beat their man straight up. It was very macho, very Midwestern and very Big Ten. But it wasn't the answer.

When Greg Mattison left to coordinate Notre Dame's defense after the 1996 season, Carr handed the defensive reins to Herrmann, who was coaching linebackers and special teams at the time. It took restraint and control for a defensive-minded coach to back off, but Carr did and Herrmann schemed away. The Wolverines became an aggressive, attacking unit that unleashed the full potential of its athletes. Guys like Dhani Jones, Woodson, Marcus Ray, Hall, Andre Weathers and Sam Sword ran wild for a unit that ranked No. 1 nationally in total defense (206.9), scoring defense (8.9) and pass-efficiency defense (75.8). Granted, the Big Ten wasn't full of vaunted offenses, but the Wolverines' numbers still were impressive and became the focal point in their drive for an undisputed national championship.

That's right: Michigan is the undisputed champ, even though the coaches awarded their title to a Nebraska team that capped a 13-0 season with a



**OVER PURSUIT:** Wolverines linebacker Ian Gold (20) was part of an uplifting effort by Michigan's top-rated defense.

Nebraska entered that contest ranked No. 1 but needed a miracle kick-save by wingback Shevin Wiggins and diving end-zone catch by Matt Davison to tie the game on the last play of regulation and force overtime. Despite that triumph, Nebraska dropped to No. 3 in the rankings.

After manhandling Tennessee, Nebraska quarterback Scott Frost, defensive end Grant Wistrom and defensive tackle Jason Peter campaigned for at least a portion of the national title, with Frost disparaging Michigan's schedule and the weakness of the Big Ten in bowls. The nation's coaches gave them their wish. Michigan became the first team since Colorado in 1991 to enter the bowls No. 1 in each poll, win and still fall from a top spot.

"It's just such a real sense of relief to do it for coach Osborne," Peter said. "We felt we established ourselves, and we felt we deserved it."

It was a great year for the Huskers, but this was Michigan's season. This was Brian Griese's season.

"I never wanted to be part of the limelight," Griese said. "I only wanted to be part of the team. After being faced with four losses and to go out with a Big Ten championship, Rose Bowl championship and national championship is great. It's the way you want to leave a program, winning a national championship and going out a winner." **TSN**

Associate editor Tom Dienhart covers college football for THE SPORTING NEWS.

42-17 victory over Tennessee in the Orange Bowl.

It's a scenario similar to 1994, when Penn State fell from the No. 1 spot in the coaches poll following an unimpressive late-season win at Indiana. That slide allowed the Cornhuskers to assume the No. 1 ranking in both polls. Each team won out, but the Nittany Lions were denied a piece of the prize—despite their perfect mark.

An unimpressive 45-38 overtime victory over Missouri, domination in a weak league and victories over such non-league foes as Central Florida and Akron should be enough to keep Tom Osborne's final team from winning its third national title in four years—especially the Missouri game.



**WHO'S NO. 1?** Not everybody supported Michigan after Nebraska's Orange Bowl win.

## A look ahead

The best team in 1998? Obviously, that's tough to pick eight months out. But for the most part, expect the usual cast of contenders, with perhaps one surprise. A look alphabetically at the teams that should be in the running:

■ **Arizona State.** Who knows what will happen in the Pac-10? Washington State and UCLA lose a lot of starters, Washington needs quarterback Brock Huard to return and USC remains an enigma. That leaves the Sun Devils, who will be good if quarterback Ryan Kealy's knee is sound. ASU returns eight offensive starters and should be potent. The defense, where seven seniors depart, is the question. The schedule is tough: home games against Washington and Notre Dame and road games against BYU, USC, Oregon and Arizona.

■ **Florida.** If the Gators get consistent play from their quarterback and find two new cornerbacks, a run at the national title is likely. The front seven on defense will be tremendous and the offensive line will be improved. The schedule includes trips to Tennessee, Alabama and Florida State and visits from LSU and Auburn.

■ **Florida State.** Offensively, the 'Noles will be fine. They'll need a new quarterback—don't be surprised if Chris Weinke beats out Dan Kendra for the job—and it would be a big plus if wide receiver Peter Warrick stays for one more season. The only weakness on defense appears to be at linebacker. The secondary loses two starters, but two former starters who were suspended this season will return for '98. The schedule is kind: USC, North Carolina, Clemson, Virginia and Florida visit Tallahassee.

■ **LSU.** Even if tailback Kevin Faulk goes pro, the Tigers will have nine starters back on offense. And there's a feeling Cecil "The Diesel" Collins is

better than Faulk, anyway. The key will be the defense, which will change to a 3-4 set under new coordinator Lou Tepper; there will be eight returning starters on that side of the ball. The schedule could be a bit dicey, with trips to Auburn, Florida, Mississippi and Notre Dame, but the Tigers could spring a surprise rise.

■ **Michigan.** The defense has a chance to be dominating again, even with the expected departure of Charles Woodson to the NFL. Anthony Thomas should emerge as one of the best running backs in the nation, and he'll run behind a good line. The big question: Who'll be the quarterback? The schedule, as usual, is tough, with visits to Notre Dame, Iowa and Ohio State and visits from Syracuse, Michigan State, Penn State and Wisconsin.

■ **Nebraska.** The Huskers will have a new coach, a new quarterback and a new offensive line. The coach, obviously, will be the most important new face, but expect Frank Solich to keep things running at a high level. Look for Bobby Newcombe to be the quarterback. As for the offensive line, the Huskers plug in new guys every year and it never seems to matter. One plus: The back seven on defense will be much better in '98 than it was in '97. The big non-conference game is a visit from Washington.

■ **Ohio State.** The offensive line will be much improved, which should mean a stronger running game, and tailback Michael Wiley has star potential. The receivers will be among the nation's best. The defense will be better, even if cornerback Antoine Winfield doesn't return. Linebacker Andy Katzenmoyer will head into the '98 season as the nation's premier defensive player—and a top Heisman contender. The schedule is conducive to a title run, as the Buckeyes get Penn State and Michigan in Columbus. The opener at West Virginia could be interesting. —Mike Huguenin





Tom Dienhart and Mike Huguenin

## No. 1 team open for debate, but conference king clear

If the bowl season did anything—it certainly didn't give us a clear-cut No. 1—it showed the Southeastern Conference was the nation's best conference, with the Pac-10 close behind.

Obviously, you can't rate a conference strictly on how its members did in bowls. After all, it's hard to imagine Wisconsin, for example, getting as stoked to play Georgia in the Outback Bowl as it would have for Iowa or Michigan during the Big Ten season. At the same time, bowls can be an accurate barometer of a league's strengths and weaknesses. The highlights:

### The SEC rules.

Before the Orange Bowl, "SEC" could have stood for "Successful in Every Contest." Tennessee was the only one of six league teams to lose in a bowl. The Pac-10 also went 5-1, but two of the wins were over WAC schools. The ACC was 3-1, but two of the wins were against Big East teams. The SEC's biggest attribute is team speed. Outside that conference, only Nebraska and Florida State truly have great team speed. Yes, Michigan was quick on defense, but Penn

State coach Joe Paterno says Florida's defense was "a little quicker than Michigan's." And Georgia's defense shut down Wisconsin with a mix of speed and toughness. As Bulldogs linebacker Brandon Tolbert put it, "They hit the hole slower than we were used to. SEC backs hit the hole a lot faster."

**The Big East is bad.** All season, critics harped on how bad the Big East was; in retrospect, they should have been harsher. The conference was 0-4 in bowls, and league champ Syracuse was whipped by a solid—but not great, by any means—Kansas State team. As for the rest of the Big East, the less said the better. Virginia Tech and Pittsburgh were outscored by a combined 83-9.

**The Big Ten was overrated.** Some analysts thought the Big Ten was the nation's strongest league. After the postseason, you have to wonder if it even was the nation's second best. One reason for all those lofty rankings for Big Ten schools in pass-efficiency defense is that no league team outside Purdue and Ohio State had a big-time passing attack—though Michigan did unveil one in the Rose Bowl, albeit against a mediocre secondary. And in three matchups with Southern schools, Ohio State, Penn State and Wisconsin were throt-

tled. After its 4-0 start, Iowa limped home 3-5 and was punchless against Arizona State in the Sun Bowl. Michigan State continued its recent trend of not showing up for bowls.

**The Pac-10 was underrated.** Yes, two of the league's five bowl wins were over WAC teams. Still, the five winning league teams had much too much quickness for their opponents. Most impressive may have been Washington's victory over Michigan State in the Aloha; the Huskies were healthy and finally showed their true ability. And Washington State was for real in the Rose Bowl; if not for what appeared to be a quick clock, the Cougars may have knocked off Michigan and cleared up the championship picture.

The only Pac-10 and SEC teams to fall were the conference champs—and they lost to the teams that shared the national title. What that may mean is one reason

Nebraska and Michigan were the only undefeated teams is that their conferences weren't that strong.

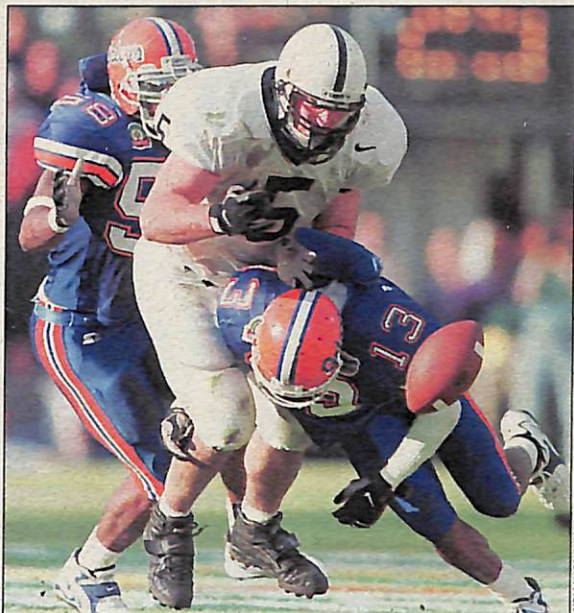
### What a turnaround

Interesting, isn't it, all the talk that emanated from Nebraska players and fans before and (especially) after the Orange Bowl, about how much the Huskers deserved the national title. We seem to recall all those Big Red folks screaming in November, when Nebraska dropped in the polls after an OT win over Missouri. Then, it was, "How can a team drop from No. 1 when it wins?" It's ironic that the same thing happened in reverse to give the Huskers a portion of the national title.

### You know what ...

Let's say every team is at full strength, every game is played on a neutral field and every team plays its best. In that scenario, which is the best team in the nation? Florida State. **TSN**

Associate editor Tom Dienhart and assistant managing editor Mike Huguenin cover college football for THE SPORTING NEWS. E-mail them at [colfb@sportingnews.com](mailto:colfb@sportingnews.com).



**PENPED STATE:** Earlier this season, the Nittany Lions were No. 1. But, like Brad Scioli (center), they couldn't hold on.

## inside dish

CAMPUS RUMBLINGS, LOCKER ROOM WHISPERS  
FROM TOM DIENHART AND MIKE HUGUENIN

An offshoot of Penn State's poor defensive performance (86th in the nation in total defense at 399.4 ypg) will be that the Nittany Lions will recruit in the junior college ranks. Look for Penn State—which almost never signs a JC transfer—to sign a defensive



**JOLLY TOLEDO:** A good year makes UCLA an easy recruiting sell.

lineman who can play right away. And look for the coaching staff to change from a read-and-react philosophy to an attack mode. ... Miami, atrocious against the run (219.9 ypg), is another established program that will look for quick help. Expect the Hurricanes to sign at least two or three JC defensive linemen; one will be 6-8, 370-pound **Stocker McDougale** of Navarro (Texas) College. ... UCLA is looking forward to a great recruiting class. USC's travails and the Bruins' success have **Bob Toledo** and his staff in line for a top-10 group. The top commitment is linebacker **Robert Thomas** (Imperial, Calif.), whose brother, **Stan**, played at Texas and was a Bears first-round pick in 1991. ... Bizarre but true: Michigan, not exactly pass-happy, has oral commitments from two of the best receivers in the nation in **David Terrell** (Richmond, Va.) and **Marquis Walker** (Syracuse, N.Y.). ... Kudos to the folks at the NCAA for letting us know they're still alive—and capable of making moronic decisions. Texas A&M wanted to wear No. 59 patches against UCLA in the Cotton Bowl to honor former linebacker **Reggie Brown**, recovering in Detroit from a career-ending neck injury. The NCAA refused, citing a statute limiting honorary helmet displays to active college players who died during the season. An NCAA spokesman says, "I don't think you memorialize somebody who is still living." Gee, guess that means teams can wear "NCAA" patches; it's hard to believe anybody in that organization has a pulse. ... Nebraska folks are wondering if tailback **DeAngelo Evans** will be back in time for spring ball; he had surgery—again—for a groin-muscle problem.



# A CAPITALISTIC

Nickle-and-diming it won't do for the Niners. They must with long plays to have a chance against the Packers.

## THE NFC PLAYOFFS by Paul Attner

**T**rent Dilfer knows it. And so does Steve Young. Might as well let the Packers know it, too. Hey, Green Bay: The 49ers are going to throw downfield on you Sunday afternoon—and it won't be to showcase Young's still-strong arm. Quite simply, San Francisco needs a bunch of long completions to win. Otherwise, it will be showtime again for Brett Favre in the Super Bowl.

That is why Young, in his postgame remarks after the 49ers' easy NFC semifinal victory over the Vikings last Saturday, kept coming back to one theme: "We need more big plays."

And that is why Dilfer, in his postgame remarks after the Buccaneers' 21-7 loss to the Packers last Sunday, kept repeating the same truism about beating Green Bay: "If you don't make plays with your pass offense against them, you can't win."

That was his message to the 49ers, whether they wanted one or not. They can compete with the Packers physically in the NFC championship game at 3Com Park, but if they think they can win by nickel-and-diming them on offense, they will be watching the Super Bowl on television.

"Green Bay will score its 17 to 24 points like it always does," says Dilfer, who had a miserable afternoon against the Packers, completing 11-of-36 passes for 200 yards and two interceptions. He maintains the 49ers can't rely on Young's possession passes, because no one can consistently pull off a series of sustained drives against the Packers. Tampa Bay had one, moving 94 yards in the third quarter, and the Bucs had one lengthy pass, a 52-yarder to Reidel Anthony. Other than that, they had to settle for small gains and failed field-goal opportunities. Now, the Packers haven't allowed a touchdown pass in the last 27 quarters.

"They are too tough to think you can pound it on them and rely on five- and six-yard gains to beat

them," says Anthony, who is faster than the 49ers' receivers. "The long stuff is there. When they blitz, they leave a lot of man coverage, so why not go after them?"

Why not, indeed? So that was to be coach Steve Mariucci's assignment this week as he and his staff drew up its game plan for the Packers. It will be an emotional experience for the already-emotional Mariucci, because it was Mike Holmgren and the Packers who gave him his big chance in the NFL as an assistant in 1992. It was with the Packers, as their quarterbacks tutor, that Mariucci struck up a still-close relationship with Favre. Favre credits the man he calls "Mooch" with helping him mature, and with serving as a much-needed buffer with Favre and the demanding Holmgren, who is more like a father figure than friend.

Mariucci did his job so well in Green Bay that he fully understands how good Favre, a three-time MVP, will play in this matchup. Now, he has to figure out how to help Young play better in running the 49ers' version of the Holmgren version of the West Coast offense. One reason Mariucci was hired to replace George Seifert after the 1996 season revolved around the conclusion by the 49ers that Holmgren directed their offense in Green Bay much better than their own team. So if they couldn't get Holmgren, they wanted someone who was familiar with his offensive thinking. Mariucci, after one season as coach at Cal, became that man. And, like Holmgren, he calls all the offensive plays during games.

"We need one or two bigger plays, we need one or two longer, bigger plays," says Young, sort of sending a message to Mariucci, who has purposely been more conservative offensively this season than Young has liked. "It was nice to show who we are offensively (against the Vikings), but I would like to make some bigger plays."

*Do you hear me, Coach?*



**UPSIDE-DOWN ACHE:** After getting flipped on his head and, later, biting his tongue against the Vikings, retiring tight end Brent Jones—along with his 49ers teammates—will have his arms filled trying to beat the Packers.

**B**ut here is the catch: No matter how keen Mariucci's hearing is, he might not be able to repair what is busted. And with the 49ers, what is broken is their big-play capability. It could be fixed quickly, only if Jerry Rice was healthy. But he isn't, and none of the 49ers' riches can make him whole again in time for this one.

Of course, Young yearns for Rice. Someone asked him how you produce long gains. "You can make short catches and turn them into long runs," he replied, no doubt envisioning Rice's signature slant-pat-

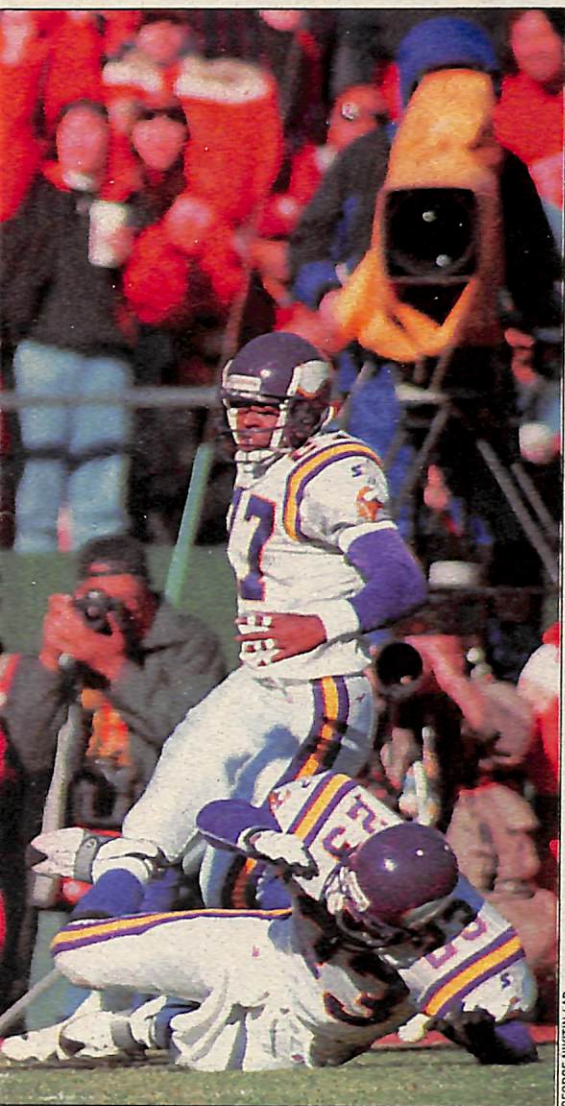
tern reception, where a seven-yard grab became a 40-yard scamper. But Rice isn't around, and as good as Terrell Owens and J.J. Stokes looked beating that woeful Vikings defense, working against a much-stronger Packers secondary is a much different matter.

Owens possesses more speed than Stokes and they both are large targets for Young. But neither is a legitimate deep threat. Nor have they been asked to produce before in this kind of high-pressure environment against a veteran defense like Green Bay's, which will not play them as



# IDEA

break the bank



GEORGE JUKITIN / AP

softly as the Vikings' cornerbacks.

"Green Bay has a big and physical front seven, which gives you problems right there," Vikings offensive coordinator Brian Billick says. "Then their cornerbacks will use their hands to rough up your receivers the whole game. They are very physical and it makes it tough to execute your timing stuff. And LeRoy Butler is the best strong safety in the league, in my opinion. The 49ers will be going against the best."

When starter Craig Newsome was lost on the first play of the opener with a knee injury, the cornerback position loomed as a huge problem for the Packers. But Tyrone Williams has developed nicely in Newsome's

place and teams with talented Doug Evans as occasional blitzers in coordinator Fritz Shurmur's schemes. It is no accident that the corners are physical; G.M. Ron Wolf purposely drafts tall, athletic corners to compete against the tall receivers in the NFL.

The cornerback-vs.-receiver matchups is one reason the Packers aren't all that concerned about having to play on the road against the 49ers. There really isn't an aspect of the game that heavily favors San Francisco, short of playing at home. Besides, Holmgren has beaten his former team three straight times, including a playoff victory after the '95 season at 3Com that marked the Packers elevation to the league's

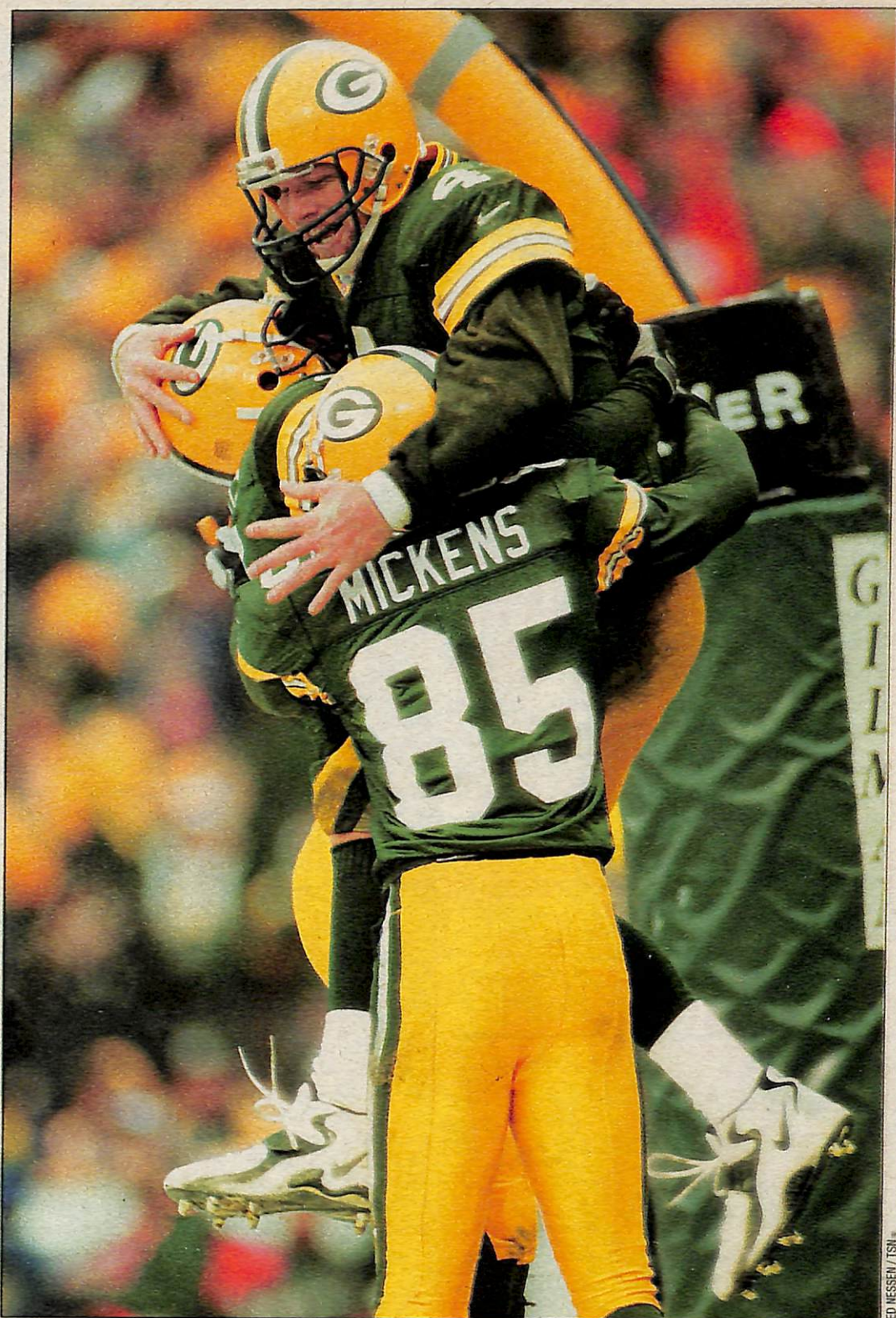
elite level.

Billick knows what he would do to neutralize the Packers. He would run early and often, drawing Butler into run assignments and loosening up the secondary. Then, he would take his shots down the field. "The long plays are there, but you have to connect on them," he says. "Against the Packers, you are only going to get a few opportunities, so you better take advantage of them."

The Buccaneers adopted that approach and had some success, picking up 90 yards on the ground. But even though leading runner Garrison Hearst is back from a broken collarbone, you wonder how long he can hold up Sunday. Don't

be deceived by Terry Kirby's 120 yards in the 38-22 triumph over Minnesota. The Vikings don't have defensive tackle Gilbert Brown; the Packers do, and when Kirby enters the game in place of Hearst, he isn't nifty enough to be effective outside, away from Brown's domination.

So without Rice and with Hearst likely unable to carry a full load, Young takes on an enormous burden. He has no 1,000-yard receiver (and no receiver with a 100-yard game during the season). His 1,000-yard rusher will be less than 100 percent. The passing offense also produced its lowest ranking (18th) since the start of the Bill Walsh era in 1979. Not that Young



ED NESSEN / TSN



isn't talented enough to handle the pressure—after all, he just won his sixth passing title—but he has never had to win a playoff game of this magnitude sans Rice and an attention-gathering running offense.

**M**ariucci never wanted it this way. Even without Rice, he had retooled the 49ers' offense in a most intelligent fashion, bulking up the offensive line and turning the club into a power-running group. "We are really a blue-collar team disguised in 49er uniforms," guard Ray Brown says. The long-range plan had been this: Keep Young healthy by not asking him to drop back too much, develop a consistent rushing scheme and bring along the young receivers. Only the Steelers (572) and Chiefs (529) called more running plays than the 49ers (523) this season, and Young didn't miss a play because of injury once he recovered from an opening-game concussion.

Young helped out by playing smarter. Last spring, he predicted he would perform differently this season, finally unwilling to risk his body to gain an extra inch on a scramble. "You probably won't see the difference, but I know I will," he said then. "It might be subtle. I might just pull up a second earlier to avoid a direct hit." No one really believed him back then, but he was true to his word. He throws for six yards now on a scramble instead of running for six, and the difference has been noticeable to him. He feels good and strong, and his efficiency



**A DUNN DEAL:** The Packers will be out to stop the 49ers' running game in its tracks, just like Bernardo Harris did to Tampa Bay's Warrick Dunn last Sunday.

and accuracy are excellent as always. He also rushed for only 199 yards, his lowest total since becoming a starter in '91.

But the injury to Hearst—in the 49ers' demolishing by Kansas City November 30—has messed up things for Mariucci. He wants to use his running back against the Packers just like Holmgren uses Dorsey Levens, to poke and push at defenses and prevent them from concentrating exclusively on Young. The Packers have become a more dangerous and difficult-to-defense attack the last 1½ seasons since Levens emerged as a premier performer.

"We can't give up on the run," Mariucci says. "That would be a mistake. We knew going into the playoffs we might have to open it up more on offense."

Young knows what it is like to try to beat the Packers with too many passes. In the playoff loss after the '95 season, he threw an incredible 65 times against a Shurmur scheme that confused the 49ers. Last season, in losing twice to the Packers, Young's role was decidedly different.

He sat out the first game, a regular-season overtime affair in which Elvis Grbac started, and was in for only nine plays during a 35-14 playoff defeat in Green Bay before injured ribs forced him out.

"I like where we are as a team," Young says. "I am just not sure where we compare (with past 49ers clubs)."

The Packers will serve as a litmus test. Favre is a younger version of Young, but he long ago realized it was far better to pass than run when flushed from the pocket. It is Favre's creativity that persuades Buccaneers safety John Lynch to choose Green Bay in this matchup.

"I think when Brett goes through his first two options and then has to improvise, that is when the play really starts," Lynch says. "He just keeps making plays and breaking your heart."

"We've played both teams this year and I have to go with the Packers. They have the better running game, they have the league MVP and their defense is peaking. That is a hard combination to beat."

Surely, it is hard to get a handle on the elusive Favre, who, like his teammates, was slightly out of sync against the Bucs, yet still threw for 190 yards and a touchdown (with two interceptions).

"I don't think anybody knows anything about me, including myself," he says with a laugh when talking about his duel with the 49ers' defense, the league's top-ranked unit. "There's no telling what

I'll do." It will help that he is throwing against an average pair of cornerbacks—veteran Rod Woodson, who was penalized 12 times this season for overaggressive coverage, and Marquez Pope, who has given up four touchdown passes since returning from an 11-week absence because of a leg injury. Watch for Holmgren to scheme so he can isolate these cornerbacks in man coverage.

**T**his is a slightly different Packers team than the one that beat New England in the last Super Bowl. Levens has replaced the injured Edgar Bennett as the No. 1 runner, and his quickness and size make him a more dangerous threat than Bennett. The offensive line, with the addition of rookie left tackle Ross Verba, reduced its sacks and became more physical. They haven't adequately replaced retired tight end Keith Jackson, but wide receivers Robert Brooks and Antonio Freeman both had more than 1,000 yards, making that position as strong as last season.

Defensively, the Packers started horribly but, save for an embarrassing effort against the Colts in the 11th game, finished strongly once Shurmur began attacking with blitzes. Other than a meaningless 31-21 win over the Bills in the finale, no team besides the Colts has scored more than 17 points on the Packers since October 12. As long as Brown's iffy ankle holds up, they remain tough to run on, but with Reggie White aging, the front-four pass rush has deteriorated. Shurmur will send extra defenders after Young, who must pounce on the resulting man-to-man coverage.

Of course, Desmond Howard is now a Raider, which has forced Holmgren into a season-long search for adequate return men. For the playoffs, he is taking a risk by turning to Brooks (punts) and Freeman (kickoffs). Brooks, who has not returned punts since 1994, averaged 16 yards on three tries against Tampa; Freeman broke a kickoff for a touchdown, only to have it nullified by a penalty. Last year in the playoffs, Howard scored on a punt return against the 49ers and a kickoff return against the Patriots.

The Packers know they are good enough to repeat, but first they have to defeat the NFC's No. 1 seed. "We can do it, but we have to play better than we did (against the Bucs)," center Frank Winters says. "We made too many mistakes. We can't do that again and expect to win. It is disappointing, but I think we are capable of playing much better."

He can be confident, because Favre is a teammate. Now it is up to Young to outplay the MVP. **TSN**

Senior writer Paul Attner covers the NFL for THE SPORTING NEWS.

## NFC PLAYOFFS

### PACKERS 21, BUCCANEERS 7

Tampa Bay	.....	0	0	7	0	7
Green Bay	.....	7	6	0	8	21

First Quarter G.B.—Chmura 3 pass from Favre (Longwell kick), 9:24.

Second Quarter G.B.—FG, Longwell 21, 13:08. G.B.—FG, Longwell 32, 14:58.

Third Quarter T.B.—Alstott 6 run (Husted kick), 8:43.

Fourth Quarter G.B.—Levens 2 run (Favre run), 1:23.

A—60,327

	T.B.	G.B.
First Downs	15	16
Rushes-Yards	27-90	32-118
Passing	173	171
Punt Returns	1-21	3-47
Kickoff Returns	5-78	2-36
Interception Returns	2-0	2-27
Comp-Att-Int	12-37-2	15-28-2
Sacked-Yards Lost	2-27	4-19
Punts	4-42	5-43
Fumbles-Lost	2-0	3-1
Penalties-Yards	3-38	7-90
Time of Possession	27:57	32:03

#### INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

**RUSHING**—Tampa Bay, Dunn 18-64, Alstott 7-21, Anthony 1-5, Walsh 1-0. Green Bay, Levens 25-112, Favre 5-2, Henderson 2-4. **PASSING**—Tampa Bay, Dilfer 11-36-2-200, Walsh 1-1-0-0. Green Bay, Favre 15-28-2-190. **RECEIVING**—Tampa Bay, Copeland 4-44, Moore 3-54, Dunn 2-34, Anthony 1-52, Thomas 1-16, Davis 1-0. Green Bay, Freeman 4-75, Levens 4-29, Mayes 2-37, Chmura 2-20, Henderson 2-8, R. Brooks 1-21. **MISSED FIELD GOAL ATTEMPTS**—Tampa Bay, Husted 43. **INTERCEPTIONS**—Tampa Bay, Abraham 2-0. Green Bay, Ty Williams 1-14, Prior 1-13. **KICKOFF RETURNS**—Tampa Bay, Anthony 4-68, White 1-6. Green Bay, Freeman 4-75. **PUNT RETURNS**—Tampa Bay, Anthony 1-21. Green Bay, R. Brooks 3-47. **SACKS**—Tampa Bay, Sapp 3, Culppepper 1. Green Bay, Butler 1, McKenzie 1.

### 49ERS 38, VIKINGS 22

Minnesota	.....	7	0	7	8	22
San Francisco	.....	7	14	0	7	38

First Quarter S.F.—Floyd 1 run (Anderson kick), 6:57. Min.—Carter 66 pass from Cunningham (Murray kick), 7:34.

Second Quarter S.F.—Kirby 1 run (Anderson kick), 8:32. S.F.—Norton 23 interception return (Anderson kick), 9:19.

Third Quarter S.F.—FG, Anderson 34, 6:43. Min.—Carter 3 pass from Cunningham (Murray kick), 9:47. S.F.—Owens 15 pass from S. Young (Anderson kick), 13:00.

Fourth Quarter S.F.—Kirby 1 run (Anderson kick), 7:28. Min.—Hatchette 13 pass from Cunningham (Walsh pass from Cunningham), 11:13.

A—65,018

	Min.	S.F.
First Downs	16	31
Rushes-Yards	16-57	41-175
Passing	321	219
Punt Returns	4-22	0-0
Kickoff Returns	5-109	2-28
Interception Returns	0-0	1-23
Comp-Att-Int	18-40-1	21-30-0
Sacked-Yards Lost	1-10	1-5
Punts	7-30	6-39
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	0-0
Penalties-Yards	12-91	7-69
Time of Possession	21:56	38:04

#### INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

**RUSHING**—Minnesota, R. Smith 8-33, Hoard 5-11, Cunningham 2-14, Evans 1-(minus 1). San Francisco, Kirby 25-120, Levy 9-5, S. Young 4-37, Floyd 3-13. **PASSING**—Minnesota, Cunningham 18-40-1-331. San Francisco, S. Young 21-30-0-224. **RECEIVING**—Minnesota, Carter 6-93, Reed 5-114, Glover 3-84, R. Smith 3-27, Hatchette 1-13. San Francisco, Stokes 9-101, Owens 4-49, Jones 3-39, Kirby 3-24, Levy 1-6, Floyd 1-5. **MISSED FIELD GOAL ATTEMPTS**—None. **INTERCEPTIONS**—San Francisco, Norton 1-23. **KICKOFF RETURNS**—Minnesota, Palmer 5-109. San Francisco, Levy 2-28. **PUNT RETURNS**—Minnesota, Palmer 4-22. **SACKS**—Minnesota, Randle 1. San Francisco, Barker 1.



by Dan Pompei

# AGE PROGRESSION

**If Kordell Stewart wants a glimpse of himself at 37, he can look across the field at John Elway on Sunday**

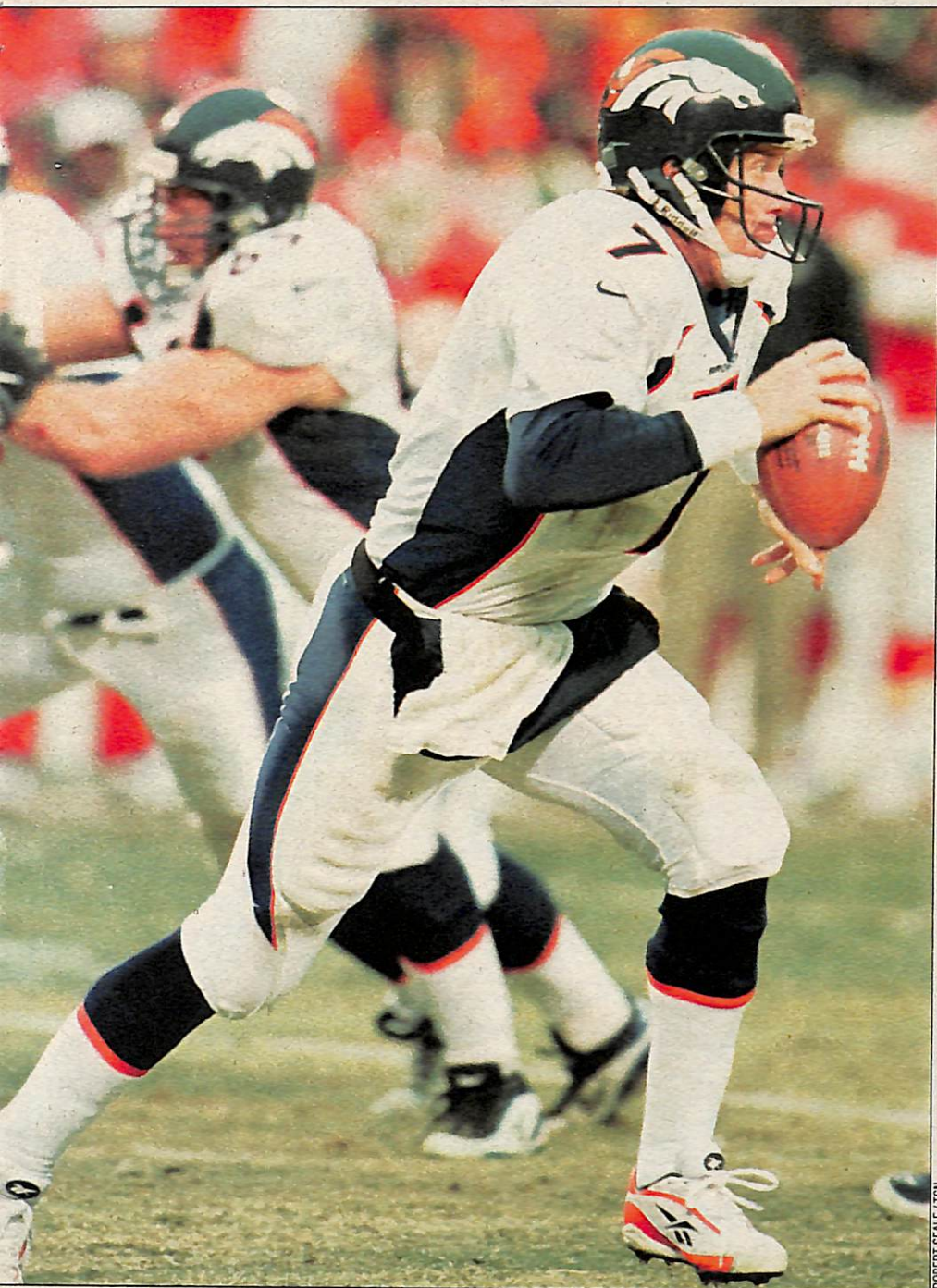
**A**s the rivers Ohio, Monongahela and Allegheny intersect in Pittsburgh, so, too, will yesterday and tomorrow when 37-year-old John Elway of the Broncos and 25-year-old Kordell Stewart of the Steelers meet Sunday

for the right to represent the AFC in the Super Bowl.

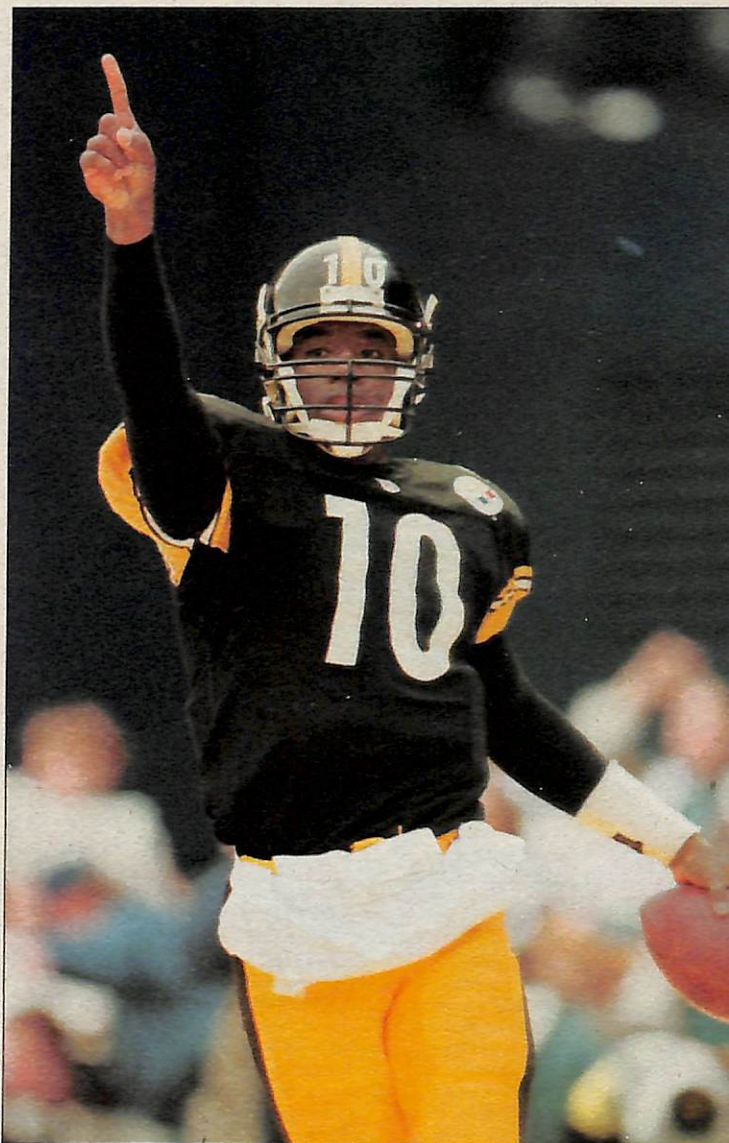
To a large extent, Stewart is Elway sans gray. If any young quarterback has the genes and means to play like Elway has, it is Stewart.

"I see a lot of similarities," says Steelers offensive coordinator Chan

Gailey, who has coached Stewart for three years and Elway for six. "They both love the ball in the clutch. They both feel they can make the plays to win the game. Their confidence is supreme. Both have great mobility, but John isn't as mobile as he used to be. The advantage John had is he



ROBERT SEALE / TSN



**ROLE MODEL:** Stewart (above) patterns himself after Elway, whose resourcefulness with his arm and legs have rallied Denver many times. Stewart has shown that knack this season.



## TSN Free Agents Basketball

who can be claimed after 2 PM on Monday, Jan. 12th, and before 9 PM on Sunday, Jan. 18th, and be on your team for games beginning Monday, Jan. 19th.

PO ID	PLAYER / TEAM	SALARY
G 102	Mookie Blaylock, Atlanta	.....\$4,100,000
G 237	Derek Anderson, Cleveland	....\$1,100,000
F 309	Joe Smith, Golden State	.....\$3,230,000
F 433	Danny Fortson, Denver	.....\$1,200,000
C 518	Ervin Johnson, Milwaukee	....\$1,890,000

## Hockey

who can be claimed after 9 AM on Friday, Jan. 9th, and before 9 PM on Thursday, Jan. 15th, and be on your team for games beginning Friday, Jan. 16th.

PO ID	PLAYER / TEAM	SALARY
G 1	Dominik Hasek, Buffalo	.....\$3,200,000
C 197	Jamie Langenbrunner, Dallas	....\$610,000
W 403	Keith Tkachuk, Phoenix	.....\$2,770,000
W 510	Pavel Bure, Vancouver	.....\$990,000
D 817	Bryan Berard, NY Islanders	....\$1,140,000
D 841	Robert Svehla, Florida	.....\$900,000

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1	Gary Kreutz	.....Edmonton, ALB
2	Wycoff/Astor	...Madison Heights, MI
3	Tom Dudman	.....Van Nuys, CA
4	SWycoff/Astor	...Madison Heights, MI
5	Dan Manning	.....Indianola, IA
6	Keith Schoose	.....Long Beach, CA
7	Steve/Kenny Carter	...Memphis, TN
8	Ivan Friedman	.....Austin, TX
9	Gary Myas	.....Stockton, CA
10	Jon Berenson	.....Providence, RI

### \$10,000 HOCKEY CASH GRAND PRIZE LEADERS THRU 12/25

1	Faltin / Schneiker	...Moerfelden, GER
2	Krajnc/Steinman	....Port Huron, MI
3	David Beckman	.....Battleford, SAS
4	Michael Cascio	...New Hyde Park, NY
5	Benny Potter	....Oklahoma City, OK
6	David Beckman	.....Battleford, SAS
7	John Papadakis	.....Montreal, QUE
8	Anthony Cascio	....Ridgewood, NY
9	Mark Desmarais	.....Montreal, QUE
10	Chris Reardon	.....Encinitas, CA

### \$10,000 PLAYOFF FOOTBALL CASH GRAND PRIZE LEADERS THRU 12/25

1	Mike Tedesco	.....Mullica Hill, NJ
2	Jeff Schwartz	.....Greenfield, WI
3	Jeff Laman	.....US SERVICEMAN
4	John Tonnemacher	.....Orlando, FL
5	Jeffrey Miller	.....Brookeville, MD
6	Jason Cass	.....Sioux Falls, SD
7	Dan Evans	.....Germantown, TN
8	Tim Curley	.....Palos Heights, IL
9	Don Weyand	.....Lakewood, CO
10	Barron Crawford	.....Chicago, IL

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# The AFC championship game figures to be a thriller because both quarterbacks have shown a penchant for the comeback.

always played in a pro dropback offense. Kordell hasn't done that. He's bounced around in different offenses. I'd like for him to be in this offense for three more years and see what he can do."

As similar as they are, their strong points differ. Elway came into the league as an accomplished passer and became one of the all-time best. Stewart came into the league with more functions than a fancy pocket-knife, but he wasn't specialized enough to be a quarterback until this, his third year. It would be asking a lot for Stewart ever to approach Elway's efficiency as a passer.

As a runner, Elway never was in Stewart's class. "He's bigger and faster than me," says Elway, who is right about the faster part. Elway, at 6-3, 215, has two inches and three pounds on Stewart. Steelers backup quarterback Mike Tomczak says Stewart, like Elway, knows where every defender is. "He's not looking at the guy who's bearing down on him—he's looking at the next guy," Tomczak says. "Elway was like that for the first 10 years of his career."

Stewart took off with the ball 88 times this season and averaged 5.4 yards per try, whereas Elway ran 50 times for a 4.4-yard average. Stewart scored 11 rushing touchdowns to Elway's one. Never in Elway's life did he have 476 rushing yards in a season, as Stewart did in his first as a starter. But Stewart still trails Elway in career rushing yards by 2,580.

Indeed, one has crow's feet, the other has dancer's feet. Stewart's first impulse when he sees receivers blanketed or pass rushers closing in is to tuck the ball away and run. Elway is more inclined to try to buy time or even throw away the ball. "Stewart is a guy who's a big-time threat when things break down, and that's the way John has been, especially early in his career," Broncos offensive coordinator Gary Kubiak says.

Because of their abilities to pass and run, both are wild cards. The



**GOOD STUDY HABITS:** The Broncos shut down Allen and the Chiefs by loading up against the run.

only other quarterbacks who can threaten big plays in such a way are Brett Favre, Steve Young, Mark Brunell, Steve McNair and Randall Cunningham.

Though Stewart had plenty of exposure to Elway when he played at the University of Colorado and now patterns his game after Elway's, there is one major difference between the passers: Stewart's improvisations don't include audibles. Whereas Elway may audible on up to 25 percent of the plays in a given game, the Steelers' coaching staff forbids Stewart from using audibles. It isn't a reflection of Stewart so much as an offensive policy, but Stewart could change the policy in time. After all, what better forum to earn trust than the playoffs?

"He has to be more consistent with his reads, his accuracy and making decisions," Steelers director of football operations Tom Donahoe says. "It will come with experience.

But I think he can be a superstar in the league."

The AFC championship game figures to be a thriller because both quarterbacks have shown a penchant for the comeback. Four times this season, the Steelers have won games in which they did not lead at the half. And that is what makes them such a dangerous January team.

"If we don't come back," Gailey says, "it's because we run out of time, not because we can't." So unfamiliar are the Steelers to a halftime lead that Gailey wasn't quite sure what to say to his troops with a 7-3 lead at the intermission of the Steelers' 7-6 victory over the Patriots last Saturday. "I know you're not used to being ahead at halftime," he told his players, "but we'll have to adjust."

The Steelers can't overcome a deficit unless Stewart is in a second-half groove. That is not an unreasonable expectation, however. During the regular season, he had a 97.2 passer rating in the second halves of games. In first halves, he had a 55.1 passer rating. Fifteen of his 21 touchdown passes came in the second half; thirteen of his 17 interceptions came in the first half. One scout says, in his opinion, Stewart is the NFL's streakiest passer and it just so happens some of his best streaks have come late in games.

At times, opposing defenses have tried to confuse Stewart at the start of the game by showing him new looks—hence, he has started slowly. "The thing about him is he's been able to right himself from one half to the next," Donahoe says.

**T**he Steelers also get stronger as games go on because running back Jerome Bettis steadily grinds down opponents. He introduces ache to their legs, numb to their arms and doubt to their hearts while forcing opponents to pay more attention to him than Stewart. That takes pressure off the quarterback and opens cracks in pass defenses that might not have been there in the first half.

In the offseason, the Steelers were secure enough to allow players such as Chad Brown, Rod Woodson, Ray Seals, Deon Figures, Willie Williams, Ernie Mills and Andre Hastings to leave as free agents. But they were smart enough to realize they couldn't lose Bettis. He was one free agent they were determined to sign, and they did it



at the expense of losing others. "We need to have a quality running back to do what we do offensively," Donahoe says. "It's a ball-control offense; we like to eat up the clock. We need a guy who can take a pounding. We thought Jerome was the ideal back for what we do."

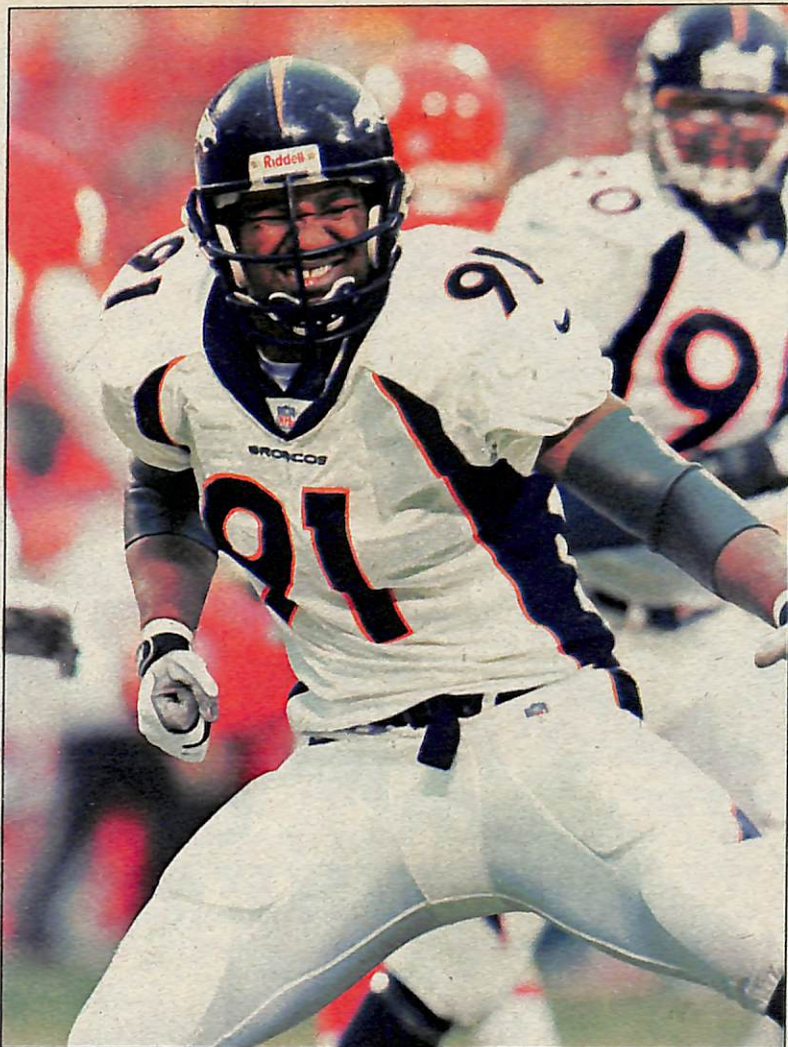
Bettis did take a pounding against the Patriots but didn't pound back much. He wasn't very effective in either half, gaining 25 before the break and 42 after. Stewart did not exactly overwhelm the Patriots in the second half, either. In fact, he was better in the first half, before the Patriots figured out they had to have their outside rush people contain him. Fifty-five of Stewart's team-high 68 yards rushing, including a 40-yard touchdown run, came in the first half.

The first time the Steelers and Broncos met, on December 7, the Stewart-Bettis combination clicked much better. The Steelers trailed, 21-7, in the second quarter but took over in the second half, with Stewart completing 64 percent of his throws and Bettis rushing for 74 of his 125 yards. The Steelers ended up with 476 yards of offense in their 35-24 victory that day.

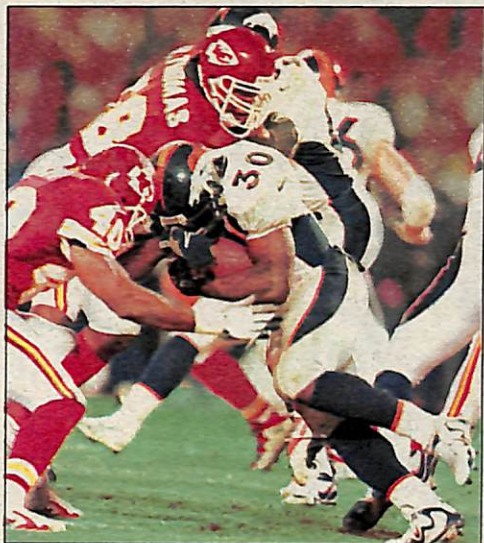
"They just beat us up," still-perplexed Broncos coach Mike Shanahan says. "I don't think we've had a team have that kind of success against us in the three years I've been here. They had close to 500 yards, and it could have easily been 600 or 700."

Bettis had a 5.2-yard average per rush. In other games this season, the Broncos allowed Antowain Smith of the Bills a 5.8-yard average and Natrone Means of the Jaguars a 4.0-yard average. The common denominator: all are big backs. Is the Broncos' defense physical enough to bang helmets against four-wheel-drive ballcarriers? Shanahan acknowledges his team has been vulnerable against big backs. Then again, backs in all sorts of packages have had success against the Broncos, who allowed an average of 4.8 yards per run this season, worst in the NFL.

The Broncos have reason to believe their run defense has improved. The Chiefs ranked fifth in the NFL in rushing yards per game but managed only 77 yards on the ground in their 14-10 loss to the Broncos last Sunday at Arrowhead Stadium. Preparation was the key, according to Broncos defensive end Neil Smith. "We knew when they came in with Marcus Allen or Donnell Bennett what plays they would run," Smith says.



**SWEET REVENGE:** End Alfred Williams and the Broncos took delight in their win in Kansas City, the site of an earlier loss that cost them the AFC West title.



**CENTURY MAN:** Davis rushed for 101 yards, his third 100-yard game vs. the Chiefs this season.

So the Broncos were able to load up on the run against the Chiefs. They tried in their last game against the Steelers and suffered the consequences when Steelers receiver Yancey Thigpen caught six passes for 175 yards and three touchdowns. The Broncos left cornerback Darrien Gordon alone with Thigpen on about 80 percent of the plays and jammed the box with as many as nine defenders in an attempt to contain Bettis. This time, Shanahan kids, triple-teaming Thigpen may be

a better option. Gordon (5-11, 182) gives up two inches and 23 pounds to Thigpen.

"I still have nightmares about that first game," Gordon says. "He's a big receiver. I'm not a huge corner. I'm average size. He has great speed and runs great routes. But I think I match up well with anybody."

The Broncos should be able to stay in the game with the Steelers this time if their receivers just hang onto the ball. In their first game in Pittsburgh, Broncos receivers dropped an estimated 10 catchable balls. Pro Bowl tight end Shannon Sharpe had three.

"I'm looking forward to playing Pittsburgh because the last time I was there I didn't play very well," Sharpe says. "Hopefully, I can vindicate myself. I didn't catch the ball well or read the blitz well. I got frustrated early. I had all my drops in one game."

That game was a turning point for both

teams. The following week, the Steelers beat the Patriots in overtime to clinch the AFC Central. The Broncos followed the loss with another critical loss, this one to the 49ers, that secured their fate as a wild-card team.

But their playoff victory over the Chiefs has the Broncos feeling good again. It was their first significant road victory of the season. Smith says the Broncos already feel like they beat the best team in the AFC.

"It makes you tougher being able to go on the road and win," Sharpe says. Especially after having gone on the road and lost.

"Talentwise, there never was a question in my mind we should get here," Elway says. "It was just a matter of if we were playing our best football going into the playoffs. I was concerned about the way we played against Pittsburgh and San Francisco. If I said I wasn't, I'd be lying to you."

Elway's experience showed in the Broncos' victory over the Chiefs, even though his numbers (10-of-19 for 170 yards) weren't dazzling. You have to wonder, at some point, if Stewart's lack of experience will show up in the playoffs. Steelers coach Bill Cowher points out Stewart already has played in a Super Bowl, and he says he likes the look in Stewart's eyes.

"Kordell is a lot like John in that he finds a way to win," Shanahan says. "I've got a lot of respect for him."

If Stewart finds a way to win Sunday, the comparisons will gain new validity.

TSN

Senior writer Dan Pompei covers the NFL for THE SPORTING NEWS.

## AFC PLAYOFFS

### STEELERS 7, PATRIOTS 6

New England	0	3	0	3	6
Pittsburgh	7	0	0	0	7
First Quarter Pit.—Stewart 40 run (N. Johnson kick), 5:11.					
Second Quarter N.E.—FG, Vinatieri 31, 7:20.					
Fourth Quarter N.E.—FG, Vinatieri 46, 2:44.					
A—61,228					

	N.E.	Pit.
First Downs	15	16
Rushes-Yards	19-36	37-145
Passing	244	134
Punt Returns	3-24	4-78
Kickoff Returns	2-36	3-44
Interception Returns	1-0	2-48
Comp-Att-Int	23-44-2	14-31-1
Sacked-Yards Lost	2-20	2-0
Punts	7-42	9-33
Fumbles-Lost	2-2	0-0
Penalties-Yards	7-68	5-41
Time of Possession	24:23	35:37

### INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

**RUSHING**—New England, Shaw 10-22, Cullores 7-18, Bledsoe 2-(minus 4), Pittsburgh, Bettis 25-67, Stewart 11-68, McAfee 1-10.  
**PASSING**—New England, Bledsoe 23-44-2-264, Pittsburgh, Stewart 14-31-1-134.  
**RECEIVING**—New England, Jefferson 9-104, Glenn 5-96, Brisby 3-37, Byars 2-1, Shaw 1-13, Brown 1-6, Gash 1-6, Cullores 1-1.  
**PITTSBURGH**, Hawkins 4-28, Thigpen 3-54, C. Johnson 3-28, Lester 2-3, Kirkland 1-21.  
**KICKOFF RETURNS**—New England, Canty 2-36, Pittsburgh, Blackwell 3-36.  
**PUNT RETURNS**—New England, Meggett 3-24, Pittsburgh, Blackwell 4-78.  
**SACKS**—New England, McGinest 1 1/2, Slade 1/2, Pittsburgh, Vrabel 1, Gildon 1.

### BRONCOS 14, CHIEFS 10

Denver	0	7	0	7	14
Kansas City	0	0	10	0	10
Second Quarter Den.—Davis 1 run (Elam kick), 13:04.					
Third Quarter K.C.—FG, Stoyanovich 20, 5:18.					
K.C.—Gonzalez 12 pass from Grbac (Stoyanovich kick), 14:50.					
Fourth Quarter Den.—Davis 1 run (Elam kick), 2:28.					
A—76,965					

	Den.	K.C.
First Downs	16	18
Rushes-Yards	32-109	24-77
Passing	163	226
Punt Returns	1-36	1-10
Kickoff Returns	3-71	3-69
Interception Returns	0-0	0-0
Comp-Att-Int	10-19-0	24-37-0
Sacked-Yards Lost	1-7	4-34
Punts	6-36	5-46
Fumbles-Lost	4-2	2-0
Penalties-Yards	8-64	7-65
Time of Possession	28:54	31:06

### INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

**RUSHING**—Denver, Davis 25-101, Griffith 4-9, Loville 2-0, Elway 1-(minus 1), Kansas City, Allen 12-37, Grbac 4-22, Anders 3-9, Bennett 3-4, Aguilar 1-3, Hill 1-2.  
**PASSING**—Denver, Elway 10-19-0-170, Kansas City, Grbac 24-37-0-260.  
**RECEIVING**—Denver, McCaffrey 3-56, Sharpe 2-33, R. Smith 2-19, Carswell 1-26, Green 1-19, Davis 1-17, Kansas City, Rison 8-110, Popsom 5-26, Gonzalez 3-26, Dawson 2-20, Anders 2-4, Horn 1-50, Hughes 1-13, Allen 1-8, Vanover 1-3.  
**MISSED FIELD GOAL ATTEMPTS**—Kansas City, Stoyanovich 44.  
**INTERCEPTIONS**—None.  
**KICKOFF RETURNS**—Denver, Hebron 2-51, Loville 1-20, Kansas City, Vanover 3-69.  
**PUNT RETURNS**—Denver, Gordon 1-36, Kansas City, Vanover 1-10.  
**SACKS**—Denver, N. Smith 2, Williams 2, Kansas City, Woods 1.



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3rd	\$10,000	\$500	\$100
4th	\$5,000	\$250	\$75
5th	\$2,000	\$150	\$50
6th to 10th	\$1,000	\$100	
11th to 25th	\$250	\$50	
26th to 100th	\$100		

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ID#	Player	Team	Sal.	ID#	Player	Team	Sal.	ID#	Player	Team	Sal.	ID#	Player	Team	Sal.	ID#	Player	Team	Sal.	ID#	Player	Team	Sal.	ID#	Player	Team	Sal.	ID#	Player	Team	Sal.																		
4928	Piazza, Mike	LA	1580	5308	Vera, Fernando	Mil	730	5732	Jackson, Damian	Cin	350	5761	Abbott, Jeff	ChA	580	2402	Morgan, Mike	Min	840	5690	Miller, Travis	Min	350	5260	Small, Aaron	Oak	810	4928	Alomar, Roberto	Bal	1830																		
4680	Rodriguez, Ivan	Pit	1370	5151	Womack, Tony	Phi	680	5888	Tajada, Miguel	Oak	350	5497	Garcia, Karim	Ari	570	4355	Tapani, Kevin	ChN	840	5820	Perisho, Matt	Tex	350	5186	Guthrie, Ram	LA	800	4902	Valentin, John	Bos	1580																		
5662	Kendall, Jason	Pit	870	4542	Offerman, Jose	Pit	710	5666	Relaford, Desi	Phi	350	5807	Dunwoody, Todd	Fla	570	4790	Juden, Jeff	Mil	840	5494	Isringhausen, Jason	NYN	350	4394	Spoljaric, Paul	Sea	800	4217	Biggio, Craig	Hou	1580																		
4965	Lopez, Javier	Atl	840	5738	Spiezo, Scott	Oak	670					5904	Encarnacion, Juan	Det	580	4347	Navarro, Jaime	ChA	830	5830	Brock, Chris	Atl	350	5284	Frascatore, John	StL	790	5323	Durham, Ray	ChA	1160																		
4294	Alomar, Sandy	Cle	830	5709	Guerrero, Wilton	LA	620					5636	Brown, Brant	ChN	550	5127	Oliver, Darren	Tex	830	5456	Rekar, Bryan	TB	350	5379	Bocchieri, Doug	Oak	790	4905	Yon, Eric	ChA	1160																		
4482	Hundley, Todd	NYN	720	4881	Frye, Jeff	Bos	600	4181	Walker, Larry	Col	3080	3217	Daulton, Darren	Fla	550	4952	Kamieniecki, Scott	Bal	820	5040	Munoz, Bobby	Phi	350	5655	Holtz, Mike	Ana	790	4446	Beauregard, Delino	NYN	1070																		
5897	Marrero, Eli	StL	720	4609	Garcia, Carlos	Tor	580	3905	Griffey, Ken	SF	2740	5665	Ibanez, Raul	Sea	540	2201	Darwin, Danny	SF	820	4143	Greene, Tanyon	Hou	350	5068	Leskanen, Curt	Col	770	4989	Ansingh, Mike	KC	350																		
5521	Sweeney, Mike	KC	660	5676	Castillo, Luis	Fla	570	4181	Bonds, Barry	SF	2320	5301	Hollandsworth, Todd	LA	540	4130	Leiter, Al	Fla	820	5341	Sturtz, Tanyon	Tex	350	4667	Pleskovic, Mark	StL	740	5850	Sutton, Kevin	Phi	350																		
4927	Wilson, Dan	SEA	630	3001	Loretta, Mark	Mil	530	4159	Bichette, Dante	ChA	2010	5628	Ganville, Doug	Phi	530	4796	Eldred, Cal	Mil	800	5459	Wojcikowski, Steve	Oak	350	4979	Mohler, Mike	Oak	730	4820	Council, Craig	Fla	910																		
5550	Greene, Todd	Ana	630	5191	Lockhart, Keith	Atl	530	4695	Belle, Albert	ChA	2010	5417	Mouton, Lyle	ChA	530	5632	Rosado, Jose	KC	800	5452	McAndrew, Jamie	Mil	350	5077	Wendler, Turk	NYN	730	4913	Phillips, Tony	Det	910																		
4315	Holles, Chris	Bal	580	5504	Lorandini, Mickey	Mil	530	4268	Williams, Bernie	NYA	1960	5826	McDonald, Jason	Oak	530	4516	Letier, Mark	Phi	800	5860	Bowers, Shane	Min	350	5307	Myers, Mike	Mil	710	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
5434	Widger, Chris	Min	550	4556	Morandini, Mickey	ChN	520	5090	Mondesi, Raul	LA	1930	5813	Brown, Adrian	Pit	530	4323	Gardner, Mark	SF	790	5814	Jonas, Bobby M.	Col	350	4958	Embre, Alan	Atl	700	4074	Corra, Joe	Sea	740																		
3957	Steinbach, Terry	Min	540	4917	Boone, Bret	Cin	510	4547	Lankford, Ray	StL	1890	5791	McGuire, Ryan	Mon	530	5644	D'Amico, Jeff	Mil	790	5456	Carrara, Giovanni	Cin	350	5051	Guardado, Eddie	Min	770	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
4904	Pratt, Todd	NYN	530	5148	Abbott, Kurt	Fla	480	5132	Ramirez, Manny	Cle	1890	3126	Nixon, Otis	Min	530	5339	Wright, Jarret	Cle	790	5565	Bustie, Mike	StL	350	5313	Rodriguez, Frank	Min	670	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
4442	Leyritz, Jim	Bos	500	3704	McLemore, Mark	Tex	460	4918	Salmon, Tim	Ana	1790	5727	Brent, Andre	Phi	510	5340	Schmidt, Jason	Pit	790	5890	Low, Sean	StL	350	4411	Munoz, Mike	Sea	800	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
5530	Fletcher, Darrin	Tor	490	4190	Alcala, Luis	Tex	450	5126	White, Rondell	Mon	1740	4546	Plante, Phil	StL	500	5525	Hersher, Orel	SF	780	5824	Nye, Ryan	Phi	350	4420	Springer, Russ	Ari	670	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
4434	Hatterberg, Scott	Bos	480	5031	Cedeno, Domingo	Tex	450	4051	Burke, Ellis	Col	1700	5726	Dunn, Todd	Mil	490	4441	Mercker, Kent	StL	770	5510	Swartzbaugh, Dave	ChN	350	4001	Charlton, Norm	Bal	650	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
4074	MacFarlane, Mike	KC	480	3112	Fernandez, Tor	Tor	350	5543	Giles, Brian	Cle	1680	3322	Hudler, Rex	Phi	490	3740	Portugal, Mark	Phi	770	5861	Rose, Brian	Bos	350	4558	Holmes, Darren	Col	650	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
5451	Williams, George	Oak	460	5557	Bruto, Tison	Oak	350	5737	Guerrero, Vladimir	Min	1650	5698	Abud, Bob	Phi	490	4014	Belcher, Tim	KC	760	5923	Crowell, Jim	Cin	350	5373	Wengert, Don	Atl	650	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
3924	Sanchez, Benito	Tor	450	5866	Hansen, Jody	KC	350	4344	Sosa, Sammy	ChN	1620	5016	Burford, Damon	Bos	490	4949	Hitchcock, Sterling	SD	760	5580	Van, Esteban	TB	350	5849	Cather, Mike	Atl	650	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
4615	Taubensee, Eddie	Cin	440	3768	Duncan, Mariano	Tor	350	5321	Higgins, Bob	Det	1570	4963	Williams, Gerald	Atl	490	4183	Hill, Ken	Ana	760	4733	Cormier, Rhael	Mon	350	4199	Fossas, Tony	Sea	630	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
4563	Haselmann, Bill	Bos	430	5586	Cairo, Miguel	TB	350	4737	Sanders, Reggie	Cin	1550	5639	Myers, Rod	KC	480	5328	Karl, Scott	Mil	760					5156	McCurry, Jeff	Col	350	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
5270	Ueberlath, Mike	Phi	420	5590	Graffano, Tony	Atl	350	5151	Edmonds, Jim	Ana	1550	5215	Mayer, John	StL	480	4684	Castillo, Frank	Det	760					5817	Foote, Keith	ChA	620	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
5228	Johnson, Charles	Fla	420	4656	Kelly, Pat	Tor	350	4096	Gonzalez, Juan	Tex	1540	5409	Goodwin, Curtis	Col	470	5344	Baldwin, James	ChA	740					5818	Beltran, Rigo	StL	620	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
5190	Johnson, Brian	SF	410	5526	Sefcik, Kevin	Phi	350	3398	Gwynn, Tony	SD	1520	5428	Cohen, Roger	LA	430	5056	Foster, Kevin	ChN	740					5202	Sager, A.J.	Det	610	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
4722	Eusebio, Tony	Hou	390	4457	Sojo, Luis	NYA	350	5681	Jones, Andrew	Atl	1490	4509	Whitten, Roger	Col	740	3790	Myers, Randy	Tor	1890					5346	Villone, Ron	Cle	610	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
5095	Ausmus, Brad	Hou	380	5603	Millard, Ralph	Fla	350	4517	Alou, Moises	Hou	1480	5177	Roy, Cliff	Fla	410	5076	Watson, Allen	Ana	730					4126	Smith, Pete	SD	610	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
4820	Flaherty, John	TB	370	4174	Leake, Mark	Atl	350	5081	Burnitz, Jeremy	Mil	1470	5902	Coleman, Michael	Bos	410	5494	Grace, Mike	Phi	730					5280	Finley, Bryce	Det	600	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
4361	Oliver, Joe	Cin	360	4777	Sanchez, Ray	NYA	350	5347	Cordova, Marty	Min	1460	5624	Mashore, Damon	Oak	400	5743	Moehler, Brian	Det	720					5474	Herdia, Felix	Fla	600	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
5427	Zaun, Gregg	Fla	360					4903	Martin, Al	Pit	1440	5015	Mieske, Matt	Mil	400	5460	Siroka, Mike	ChA	710					1630	Ruffin, Brian	Col	600	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
4296	Girardi, Joe	NYA	350					4307	Flinley, Steve	SD	1440	5559	Kieschnick, Brooks	TB	390	3820	Witt, Bobby	Tex	700					5493	Marc, Jose	Mon	590	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
4697	Servais, Scott	ChN	350					4789	Lofgren, Kenny	Cle	1430	5420	Nevin, Phil	Ana	390	5062	Sele, Aaron	Tex	700					5315	Percival, Troy	Ana	1810	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
5715	Estalella, Bobby	Phi	350	5164	Jones, Chipper	Atl	2020	4326	Greer, Rusty	Tex	1430	4592	Turner, Paul	Pit	390	4661	Guzman, Juan	Tor	880					5455	Mesa, Jose	Cle	1780	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
5616	Casanova, Raul	Det	350	4768	Castilla, Vinny	Col	1520	5239	Justice, Dave	Cle	1420	5166	Priddy, Curtis	Bos	380	3972	Muhlolland, Terry	SF	880					5925	Nash, Robb	SF	1730	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
5216	Fabrigas, Jorge	Ari	350	5658	Rolen, Scott	Phi	1370	4326	Justice, Dave	Cle	1420	5166	Priddy, Curtis	Bos	380	3972	Muhlolland, Terry	SF	880					4752	Loiseille, Rich	Pit	1690	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
5502	Posada, Jorge	NYA	350	4070	Caminetti, Len	SD	1360	4155	Anderson, Brady	ChA	1420	2956	Eisenreich, Jim	Fla	380	5772	Johnson, John	Phi	880					4641	Beck, Rod	SF	1670	4087	Velazquez, Randy	LA	760																		
3523	Reed, Jeff	Col	350	4507	Fryman, Travis																																												





Dan Pompei

# Insider

## These coordinators earned head coaching shots

If aluminum cans were recycled as often as head coaches, the earth would have been saved by now. Last season, eight of 11 head coaching vacancies were filled by candidates who had been head coaches previously.

More than anything, the recycling may be an indication of a lack of confidence in untested offensive and defensive coordinators. But that doesn't mean there aren't a number of coordinators in the league who have shown the potential to be head coaches. As the hiring season kicks off, we present a look at coordinators who never have been NFL head coaches but have caught the attention of front-office executives.

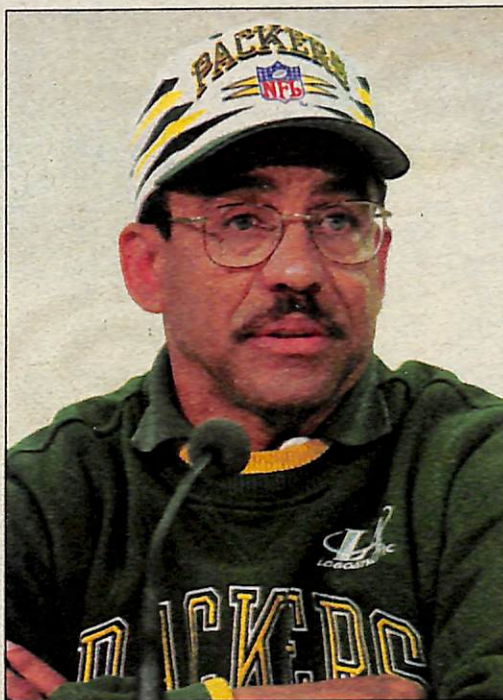
### THE SHORT LIST

**Gunther Cunningham, defensive coordinator, Chiefs.** Finds a way to get the most out of his players. Came up with the "Falcon" defense this year to take advantage of Derrick Thomas' unique pass-rushing skills. Earns respect from his players, and can be a fire-and-brimstone motivator. Prepared. Said one Chiefs employee: "I don't think I've ever been here when his car wasn't in the parking lot."

**Sherm Lewis, offensive coordinator, Packers.** A winner. Good communicator who isn't afraid to chew out a player. One reason he hasn't gotten more attention so far is it's difficult to tell how much influence he has on the Packers' game plans and play-calling since he works under offensive guru Mike Holmgren.

**Fritz Shurmur, defensive coordinator, Packers.** May be the preeminent defensive mind in the game. The only knock on him, justified or not, is that at 65, he's from the old school and can't relate to today's players.

**Emmitt Thomas, defensive coordinator, Eagles.** You can't find anyone to say a bad word about this



MORRY GASH / AP

Joe Gibbs protege. A former NFL player, he knows how to handle players, gets the most out of them and prepares his team well. He's smart and classy. He might have a case of Tony Dungyitis—he's too reserved in interviews. But he would have had the Lions' job last year if Bobby Ross were not available.

## Cap too tight?

The 1998 salary cap is projected to be in the \$47 million range. The 49ers have an NFL-high \$62 million worth of cap space committed; the Raiders have \$59 million, the second-highest total in the league. What does this mean for these two teams?

It means some players will be forced to take pay cuts or be cut. Among the 49ers who appear to be in that position are defensive end Kevin Greene (\$2.1 million cap number) and linebacker Kevin Mitchell (\$2.1 million). Those who could be asked to renegotiate include safety Tim McDonald (\$3 million), defensive end Chris Doleman (\$2.7 million), defensive end Roy Barker (\$2.3 million) and running back Garrison Hearst (\$2.3 million).

Players from the 49ers may be much more inclined to help the team than players from the Raiders, who have just concluded a dismal season and have questionable leadership. Among the Raiders who could be cut are cornerback

Larry Brown (\$2.5 million cap number), offensive tackle Pat Harlow (\$1.9 million), guard Lester Holmes (\$2.5 million) and quarterback David Klingler (\$1.5 million). Other Raiders who could be asked to renegotiate include receiver Tim Brown (\$5.8 million), guard Steve Wisniewski (\$5.8 million), defensive tackle Russell Maryland (\$3.6 million), cornerback Terry McDaniel (\$2.9 million) and defensive end Anthony Smith (\$2.3 million).

Another interesting point: The teams never intended paying some of their players what their contract appears to call for. If the 49ers decide to keep cornerback Rod Woodson, for instance, they owe him a \$3 million roster bonus March 1, and next season Woodson will be 33 years old with a \$5 million cap number. Quarterback Steve Young's cap number for next year is \$10 million, which would take up about 20 percent of the total cap space. Young and the 49ers signed the contract anticipating a renegotiation.



RICK WILSON / FLORIDA TIMES-UNION / AP

**WAITING FOR THE CALL:** Lewis (left) and Palmer (above) have performed well in their current jobs and deserve the opportunity to move up.

### A YEAR OR TWO AWAY

**Brian Billick, offensive coordinator, Vikings.** His offenses are among the most difficult to prepare for in the league because of their versatility. Utilizes all his players as well as any coach. Did a great job developing Brad Johnson. Good interpersonal skills.

**Vic Fangio, defensive coordinator, Panthers.** Good with halftime adjustments. Works well with players. His boss, Dom Capers, also is a defensive coach, so it's difficult to determine who is most responsible for the Panthers' defensive success.

**John Fox, defensive coordinator, Giants.** He may be as responsible for the Giants' turnaround as Jim Fassel. Got his players to play above their skill level. Adapts to the strengths of his personnel. Has a risk-taking style that challenges offenses. Prepared for anything—the Giants' defensive playbook was twice as thick as the offense's. Has been an NFL coordinator for less than three seasons, so Fox will benefit from more experience.

**Chan Gailey, offensive coordinator, Steelers.** He got more out of Kordell Stewart than anyone thought he would. Gailey is patient and knowledgeable and handles people well.

**Jon Gruden, offensive coordinator, Eagles.** Bright strategist is destined to be a head coach, but he's only 34. Without a starting-caliber quarterback or much of an offensive line, he managed to keep the Eagles in a lot of games. Some question why he didn't get more out of Ricky Watters, however.

**Chris Palmer, offensive coordinator, Jaguars.** The Jaguars won games with three quarterbacks this year, and Palmer deserves the credit. He also brought along Drew Bledsoe nicely last year when he was quarterbacks coach of the Patriots. Does a nice job with formations and play calling. Saints general manager Bill Kuharich calls him "an offensive version of Dom Capers." Has been calling the



plays for only one year.

**Mike Shula, offensive coordinator, Buccaneers.** His last name opens doors; his mind opens defenses. Has found a way to get the best from Warrick Dunn and Mike Alstott. Has gotten Trent Dilfer to minimize his mistakes. Shula is directing the offense of a team on the rise, and even if he doesn't use the Bucs as a springboard to a head coaching job, he's only 32 years old and already has 10 years of NFL coaching experience.

#### LONG-TERM POTENTIAL

**Sylvester Croom, offensive coordinator, Lions.** Once he figured out how to use Barry Sanders, he made the adjustments and the Lions ended up with one of the league's most potent offenses.

**Dick Jauron, defensive coordinator, Jaguars.** This former player has had a hand in the ascensions of the Packers and Jaguars.

**Gary Kubiak, offensive coordinator, Broncos.** This former quarterback lords over the best offense in football, but how much is Mike Shanahan and how much is Kubiak?

**Dave McGinnis, defensive coordinator, Cardinals.** He has excellent people skills and a good feel for the game. Leaves a trail of admirers wherever he goes.

**Steve Sidwell, defensive coordinator, Patriots.** He was made a scapegoat in New Orleans, but he knows how to attack an offense as well as any coach.

**Zaven Yarbalian, defensive coordinator, Saints.** Developed young players nicely and helped bail the water from a sinking ship in his first year in charge; he was helped by having three former coordinators on his staff.

TSN

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## Breakdown

■ The four host teams for last weekend's playoff games entered with a combined home record of 31-1 this season. The only loss: Pittsburgh's 37-7 setback to Dallas in Week 1.

■ **Terry Kirby** attained career highs in carries (25) and rushing yards (120) against the Vikings. Before last Saturday, he had two 100-yard rushing games in his career.

■ In two games against **Jerome Bettis** this season, the Patriots held him to 147 yards on 53 attempts, a 2.8-yard average. In his 15 other games this season, Bettis gained 1,585 yards on 347 carries, a 4.6-yard average.

■ The second-quarter field goal miss by the Chiefs' **Pete Stoyanovich** was his first miss since Week 3 and only his second all season.

■ Of **Trent Dilfer's** 200 yards passing against the Packers, 80 came on two plays—a 52-yarder to wide receiver **Reidel Anthony** and a 28-yarder to tight end **Dave Moore**.

■ Of **Randall Cunningham's** 331 yards passing against the 49ers, 144 came after the Niners had taken a 38-14 lead.

■ The 49ers won their 11th con-

secutive game at home, setting a team record.

■ Rookie **Sedrick Shaw**, the Patriots' leading rusher against Pittsburgh with 22 yards on 10 carries, had no carries from scrimmage in the regular season.

■ The Vikings were the only 1997 playoff team that was outscored in regular-season play (354-359). They defeated just three teams that finished with winning records: the Buccaneers, Patriots and Giants.

■ The Chiefs allowed just two running backs to gain over 100 yards this season, but **Terrell Davis** did it three times: 127, 101 and 101 yards.

■ The 49ers went three-and-out one time in their first 10 possessions. The Vikings went three-and-out in five of their first nine possessions.

■ In 14 seasons as an NFL head coach, **Marty Schottenheimer** has compiled a 138-76-1 (.644) regular season record. His postseason record is 5-11 (.313).

■ In their 29-game playoff history, the Packers' club record for yards rushing in a game is 112, set by **Dorsey Levens** last Sunday. In the three-game postseason history of the Jaguars, their rushing record is 175 yards, set by **Natrone Means** against Buffalo last season.

## Out on a limb

Fearless TSN predictions

■ **Dennis Green** will look far and wide this offseason for a head coaching job that doesn't come with a Minnesota mailing address.

■ Look for **Pete Carroll** to replace offensive coordinator **Larry Kennan** after one season on the job. Six points in a playoff game just doesn't cut it.

■ The Chiefs have spent enough time on running back **Greg Hill**. Hill's contract is up, and Kansas City needs a back with less mileage than **Marcus Allen**, 37, who may or may not be back in '98.

■ Big, physical **Terrell Owens**, who has proved he can make the tough catch in big games, will be the next superstar receiver.

## inside dish

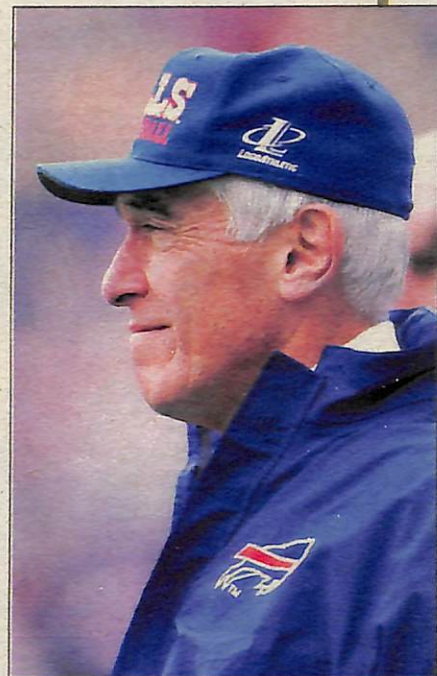
FRONT OFFICE  
RUMBLINGS  
AND LOCKER  
ROOM  
WHISPERS  
FROM DAN  
POMPEI

Some behind-the-scenes maneuvering may have contributed to **Marv Levy's** decision to resign as Bills coach. Sources say one prominent member of Levy's coaching staff (not defensive coordinator **Wade Phillips**, who is the leading candidate to replace Levy) went to Bills owner **Ralph Wilson** unbeknownst to Levy and told Wilson he needed to fire some of the offensive position coaches. Wilson bought into the argument and tried to sell Levy on it. Levy disagreed strongly. But Levy, who is universally liked and respected around the league, had been tiring of the pressures of the job anyway. So he decided to retire. ... Why is Cowboys owner **Jerry Jones** taking his time in making a coaching change that everyone knows is coming?

He could be waiting for the season of his No. 1 coaching candidate to end. The scuttlebutt: That coach is Broncos offensive coordinator **Gary Kubiak**. ... If **Jimmy Johnson** dumps offensive coordinator **Gary Stevens** and offensive line coach **Larry Beightol**, it may not bode well for quarterback **Dan Marino**.

Bringing in a new coordinator would mean Marino would have to learn a whole new offense after being in the same one, with a few twists, his entire career. Johnson might decide it would be easier to wipe the entire offensive slate clean. ... Bills linebacker **Bryce Paup** wouldn't

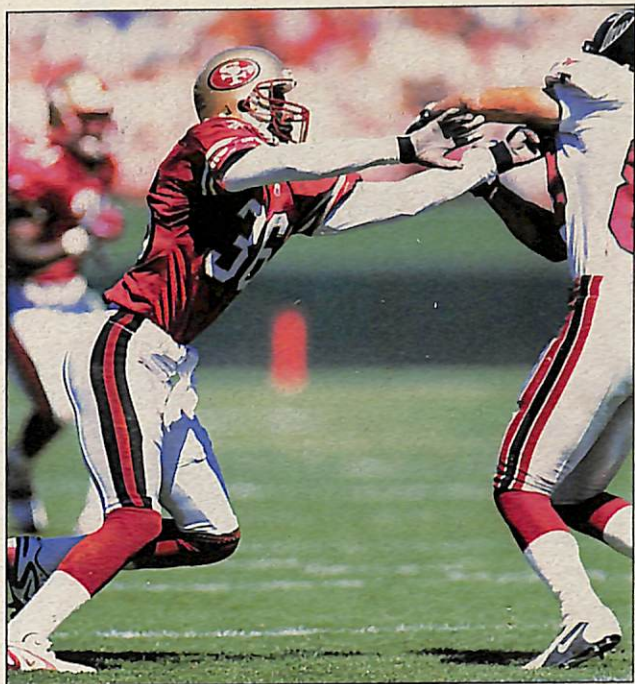
mind returning to the Packers next year. He's a free agent, and he wasn't thrilled with the Bills' switch to a 4-3 defense this season, which meant he was rushing less and dropping into coverage more. After leaving the Packers following the '94 season, Paup maintained a residence in Green Bay, and he recently bought an old home in the area to rebuild. The Packers never wanted to lose Paup but now would be reluctant to change their entire defensive scheme to accommodate his unique abilities. Over the past three years, Paup has more sacks—33½—than all players except Bills end **Bruce Smith** (38), Vikings tackle **John Randle** (37½), Saints tackle **Wayne Martin** (34½) and 49ers end **Kevin Greene** (34). But the market for Paup could be limited because most teams, like the Packers, play 4-3 defenses and prefer linebackers who can cover.



**HAD ENOUGH:** Levy didn't have the stomach for rebuilding the Bills—or for firing his coaches.

ROBERT SEALE / TSN





## The Book On... Merton Hanks

49ers, FS 6-2 / 185

Don't let that awkward-looking—but hilarious—celebration dance deceive you. Niners free safety Merton Hanks is far more than just another attention-seeking athlete. He may be the most important member of San Francisco's defense.

Against the Packers Sunday, he will be asked to help out the 49er cornerbacks, who have been less than stellar at times. Free safety Hanks actually is a better cover man than either undersized Marquez Pope or the aging Rod Woodson.

Hanks made the Pro Bowl for the fourth straight time this season after leading the 49ers in interceptions—and pivotal defensive plays. Tackle Dana Stubblefield, with his 15 sacks, was the most publicized 49ers defensive player, but it was Hanks who consistently provided the needed glue for the league's No. 1-rated unit.

His big-play capability makes Hanks perhaps the NFL's premier free safety. He plays a dangerous game of cat-and-mouse with quarterbacks, adopting a Deion Sanders-like approach. He intentionally will hang back in the secondary, hoping to lure quarterbacks into thinking he cannot close in time to offer true double coverage. But, like Sanders, his quickness enables him to cover large chunks of yardage in a blink. And what he doesn't intercept, he usually can knock down.

Hanks, a 1991 fifth-round draft choice from Iowa, started 13 games at corner his first two seasons, then moved between corner and free safety before finally securing the safety spot early in 1994. He made his first Pro Bowl that season after intercepting what remains a career-high seven passes.

At 6-2 and 185 pounds, Hanks looks awkward in a football uniform—slim by free safety standards and skinny by most football standards. He is far from a formidable tackler, preferring coverage duties to physical assignments.

He also relies heavily on instinct, which sometimes can hurt him. Against Minnesota, he misread a pass route and failed to cover a deep zone, leaving Cris Carter open for a 66-yard scoring pass.

But the 49ers allow Hanks this freedom because he has been right more often than not. In one November stretch this season, he returned a fumble for a score against Philadelphia, intercepted a pass in the end zone the next week against Carolina, then intercepted two passes against San Diego to set up 10 points. And in a Week 16 Monday night game against Denver, he returned an interception 55 yards for a touchdown to spark a 34-17 victory. —Paul Attner

ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

## PLAYOFF STATS LEADERS

### RUSHING

	Atts.	Yds.	Avg.	TDs.
Davis, Den.	56	285	5.1	4
Dunn, T.B.	36	136	3.8	0
Kirby, S.F.	25	120	4.8	2
Levens, G.B.	25	112	4.5	1
Cullors, N.E.	29	104	3.6	0
Loville, Den.	13	103	7.9	2
Alost, T.B.	18	89	4.9	2
R. Smith, Min.	24	73	3.0	0
Stewart, Pit.	11	68	6.2	1
Bettis, Pit.	25	67	2.7	0
Sanders, Det.	18	65	3.6	0
Cunningham, Min.	9	52	5.8	0
Means, Jac.	10	40	4.0	1
S. Young, S.F.	4	37	9.3	0
Allen, K.C.	12	37	3.1	0
Barber, NYG	17	29	1.7	0

### SCORING — KICKING

	XP—XPA	FG—FGA	Pts.
Daluiso, NYG	1/1	5/5	16
Murray, Min.	4/4	3/4	13
Vinateri, N.E.	2/2	3/5	11
Husted, T.B.	3/3	2/3	9
Anderson, S.F.	5/5	1/1	8
Elam, Den.	8/8	0/0	8
Longwell, G.B.	1/1	2/2	7
Hollis, Jac.	2/2	1/1	5
Hanson, Det.	1/1	1/1	4
Stoyanovich, K.C.	1/1	1/2	4

### PASS RECEIVING

	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TDs.
Carter, Min.	12	176	14.7	2
Reed, Min.	10	203	20.3	1
Jefferson, N.E.	10	111	11.1	0
Glenn, N.E.	9	153	17.0	0
Stokes, S.F.	9	101	11.2	0
Rison, K.C.	8	110	13.8	0
Morton, Det.	8	88	11.0	0
Copeland, T.B.	6	58	9.7	1
McCardell, Jac.	6	55	9.2	0
Smith, Jac.	6	55	9.2	0
Calloway, NYG	6	53	8.8	0
R. Smith, Den.	5	118	23.6	1
Glover, Min.	5	102	20.4	0
McCaftrey, Den.	5	89	17.8	0

### TEAM STATISTICS

For rushing and passing, figure is average per game; for punt and kickoff returns, figure is average per return; and for sacks and turnovers, figure is season total.  
Figure in bold is conference-leading total.

	Rushing		Passing		Yds./Play		KO Ret		Punt Ret		Sacks		TO	
	Off.	Def.	Off.	Def.	Off.	Def.	Off.	Def.	Off.	Def.	By	Vs.	Op	Ow
DENVER	209.5	63.5	182.0	206.5	6.1	4.7	26.3	23.5	25.0	7.5	7	4	2	4
DETROIT	109.0	141.0	198.0	175.0	4.4	5.3	28.0	17.3	2.5	4.0	2	2	2	1
GREEN BAY	118.0	90.0	171.0	173.0	4.5	4.0	18.0	15.6	15.7	21.0	2	4	2	3
JACKSONVILLE	50.0	310.0	187.0	201.0	4.8	6.7	23.7	29.0	5.0	14.0	3	3	2	2
KANSAS CITY	77.0	109.0	226.0	163.0	4.7	5.2	23.0	23.7	10.0	36.0	1	4	2	0
MIAMI	42.0	108.0	120.0	120.0	2.5	3.5	25.7	17.0	9.0	5.0	3	4	0	3
MINNESOTA	81.5	125.5	254.0	204.5	5.5	4.7	19.2	11.8	7.5	3.7	2	3	2	4
NEW ENGLAND	72.0	93.5	182.0	127.0	3.9	3.3	17.7	20.2	6.8	13.7	6	5	4	4
N.Y. GIANTS	76.0	106.0	190.0	187.0	3.9	4.4	10.8	17.3	3.7	11.5	2	1	3	2
PITTSBURGH	145.0	36.0	134.0	244.0	4.0	4.3	14.7	18.0	19.5	8.0	2	2	4	1
SAN FRANCISCO	175.0	57.0	219.0	321.0	5.5	6.6	14.0	21.8	0.0	5.5	1	1	1	0
TAMPA BAY	115.5	113.5	174.0	184.5	4.6	4.5	16.3	25.1	9.7	10.4	6	4	4	4

### PASSING

	Att.	Comp.	Pct.	Yards	Avg.	Yd.	TD	Pct.	Pct.	Points
								TD	Int.	
S. Young, S.F.	30	21	70.0	224	7.47	1	3.3	0	0.0	102.6
Reich, Det.	15	11	73.3	129	8.60	0	0.0	0	0.0	99.0
Elway, Den.	43	26	60.5	393	9.14	1	2.3	0	0.0	98.3
Grbac, K.C.	37	24	64.9	260	7.03	1	2.7	0	0.0	94.4
Kanell, NYG	32	16	50.0	199	6.22	1	3.1	0	0.0	80.1
Cunningham, Min.	76	33	43.4	534	7.03	4	5.3	2	2.6	74.1
Brunell, Jac.	32	18	56.3	203	6.34	0	0.0	1	3.1	62.4
Bledsoe, N.E.	76	39	51.3	403	5.30	1	1.3	2	2.6	60.4
Favre, G.B.	28	15	53.6	190	6.79	1	3.6	2	7.1	57.1
Dilfer, T.B.	62	24	38.7	381	6.15	1	1.6	3	4.8	45.2
Stewart, Pit.	31	14	45.2	134	4.32	0	0.0	1	3.2	44.3
Mitchell, Det.	25	10	40.0	78	3.12	0	0.0	1	4.0	31.8
Patten, NYG	5	86	17.2	0						0
Sanders, Det.	5	43	8.6	0						0
Dunn, T.B.	5	34	6.8	0						0
Davis, Den.	5	28	5.6	0						0
McPhail, Mia.	5	28	5.6	0						0
Popson, K.C.	5	26	5.2	0						0

## Skull session

## Just get on the 'Bus,' Gus

The Steelers call it their "check with me" play. They like to use it in short-yardage situations, and they give the appearance they want to run to the left side.

That's what they did in late November in Arizona when nearly everybody, including the Cardinals, thought the Steelers would run Jerome Bettis to the left side to put the ball in the middle of the field for a field-goal attempt. It was overtime, and the Steelers had the ball at the Cardinals' 10-yard line, facing third-and-2. But ... "we weren't thinking field goal," offensive coordinator Chan Gailey says. "It was a play to try to get a first down."

The Steelers did one better. They got a touchdown. It happened because quarterback Kordell Stewart made the perfect read. Instead of running to the left, where the play was designed, he checked off and called the play to the right. Bettis did the rest, cutting behind a pulling block by center Dermontti Dawson, lowering his shoulder and bouncing off middle linebacker Eric Hill to score on a 10-yard run, giving the Steelers a 26-20 OT win.

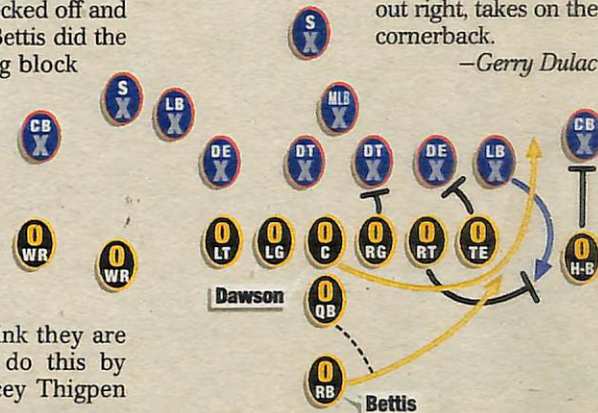
It was another case of the Steelers putting their money on the "Bus." The idea is to make the opposing team think they are running to the left. They do this by putting wide receivers Yancey Thigpen

and Charles Johnson to the left, away from the tight end. "It's set up to the run to the split end," Gailey says. In this instance, the Cardinals responded by lining up Matt Darby, their strong safety, on that side and putting strongside linebacker Ronald McKinnon on the line.

"If they overload to the split end, you go to the tight end side," Gailey says.

From there, the play unfolds almost as Gailey has it drawn up: Dawson pulls and takes on either the middle linebacker or the free safety, whichever comes clean. Right guard Brenden Stai executes a hook block on the defensive tackle while tight end Mark Bruener blocks down on the defensive end. Right tackle Justin Strzelczyk kicks out and picks up the outside linebacker. Jon Witman, the H-back, split out right, takes on the cornerback.

—Gerry Dulac







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## Bengals



**NO SACK MASTER:** The 1997 season was a rude awakening for No. 1 draft pick **Reinard Wilson**. He thought it was going to be as easy to pile up sacks in the NFL as it was during his record-setting career at Florida State. He finished with three—a huge disappointment for everyone concerned. But the Bengals aren't discouraged. They knew it was going to be a tough adjustment for Wilson, who was asked to switch from defensive end to linebacker as he learned the intricacies of the 3-4 zone-blitz defense. In the season's final weeks, he talked passionately about becoming more motivated for 1998. That's a positive sign for the Bengals, who could lose linebackers **Ricardo McDonald**, **Gerald Dixon** and **Andre Collins** to free agency. Look for the team to unleash a new and improved Wilson in 1998. He's due to excel the way Dixon did in 1997.

**AT THE CROSSROADS:** Next season will be a turning point in inside linebacker **Steve Tovar's** career. Tovar, who wrecked a knee late in the 1996 season, struggled in '97—which wasn't unexpected, considering the seriousness of his injury. He'll be fully healthy when training camp rolls around and should return to his swift, wrecking-ball self. If he doesn't, he'll be gone in 1999. But don't expect that to happen. Tovar has a warrior's mentality. He's not the most talented linebacker in the league, but nobody is going to outwork him. And his presence as a locker-room leader can't be overlooked. ... The Bengals want **Darnay Scott** back, but if he bolts, no tears will be shed. This year's draft is filled with speed-burning wideouts. —*Chick Ludwig*

## Broncos



**LESSON LEARNED:** This season has proved you can't have enough defensive linemen. Of the injuries the team sustained, the most important was the torn Achilles' tendon that ended **Jumpy Geathers'** season before it started. With Geathers gone, the defense has struggled to get consistent pressure. The Broncos had a total of four sacks during their late-season three-game trip. As the offseason beckons, adding a pass-rushing lineman will be one of the priorities. **Eric Swann** and **Dana Stubblefield** should be at the top of the list. ... **Neil Smith** had 8½ sacks this season and played hurt. But coaches will have to determine whether they want to re-sign Smith before the team determines its offseason free-agent strategy. If Smith is allowed to walk—he says he wants to return—the team could have more money to pursue one of the other big-name linemen on the market. It also would receive a third-round draft pick as compensation if Smith signs with another team.

**RIBS STILL SORE:** **Terrell Davis'** ribs aren't going to heal any time soon. He'll play the rest of the playoffs in a flak jacket. He wore one extensively in college but has a difficult time feeling the ball when he has it on. He fumbled twice at Kansas City and attributed one to the flak jacket. ... It's clear coach **Mike Shanahan** doesn't have much confidence in kicker **Jason Elam**. Against the Chiefs, Shanahan decided to punt instead of attempting a 49-yard field goal. Elam has missed a handful of important kicks down the stretch, going 3-for-7 in one three-game stretch. —*Jim Armstrong*



**RETIREMENT THOUGHTS:** Humphries thinks he can play, but the risk of another concussion is great.

## Chiefs



**1996 REVISITED:** It will be interesting to see what the Chiefs learned from their 1996 experience. They were coming off a 13-3 regular season and first-game playoff loss after earning home-field advantage throughout the postseason. It was the exact same scenario they face in 1998 after losing their playoff opener to the Broncos. The team virtually stood pat in 1996 and suffered through a 9-7 season with a roster full of disgruntled veterans. Don't look for general manager **Carl Peterson** to sit on his hands again, even though most members of the organization believe the makeup of this team is completely different from 1995. ... The contracts of running back **Greg Hill**, wide receiver **Lake Dawson** and defensive back **James Hasty** are up. Hill isn't likely to return. Dawson and Hasty will be more difficult decisions.

**REPLACING HACKETT:** The first order of business is to fill the offensive coordinator void created by the departure of **Paul Hackett**. Peterson says the decision will be coach **Marty Schottenheimer's** to make. One name being tossed around is **Mike Solari**, the team's offensive line coach. Solari is another 49ers product who knows the West Coast offense. ... The new coordinator will be asked to come up with a way to use two fullbacks to full potential. **Kimble Anders** is a great complementary player because he catches and runs the ball well. **Donnell Bennett** has intriguing possibilities. The Chiefs used him exclusively in the second half of several 1997 games, and he showed he was capable of taking over. That's something the Chiefs need. —*Luciana Chavez*

## Bills



**TAKING OVER:** **Marv Levy's** retirement as head coach has left the door open for defensive coordinator **Wade Phillips** to take over the team. Phillips, whom Levy hired in January 1995, coached the Broncos to a 16-16 record with one playoff appearance in the '93 and '94 seasons and was 1-3 as interim head coach of the Saints in 1985. Though he doesn't have much of a track record as a head coach, Phillips, 50, is the right man for the job. His stellar work with the defense is a solid block on which to build, and it has earned him the respect of the players. By promoting Phillips, the team's defensive philosophy will stay the same, allowing Phillips and general manager **John Butler** to concentrate all their efforts on upgrading the pathetic offense.

**OUT WITH THE OLD:** Speculation was rampant over Levy's retirement, but no matter how the decision was reached, it was good for all involved. Levy, 72, deserves a rest, and staying in Buffalo during its rebuilding phase would only hurt his record. Phillips deserves another shot as a head coach. And the Bills need to start over, which they wouldn't have done had Levy stayed. ... Levy was hired to coach the University of New Mexico at the age of 42 in 1958, making him at that time the youngest coach of a major college program. By retiring at 72, he is tied with **George Halas** as the oldest coach in NFL history. His 154 victories put him 10th on the all-time list. "He will definitely make the Hall of Fame, not for the great teams he coached and the leadership he exhibited," Wilson says. "He'll make it for his character." —*Sal Maiorana*

## Chargers



**HUMPHRIES' HEALTH:** Quarterback **Stan Humphries** is expected to inform the club this week about his plans for next season. Humphries suffered two concussions in 18 days last season and didn't play after the second one November 2.

Most think Humphries, 32, is leaning toward retirement. Humphries is confident he could play four or five more years, but he's not sure if it's worth the risk of permanent brain damage. "You have to realize (football) is just part of your life," he says. "I still have lots of years in front of me, as far as my life, family and kids." With the third overall pick, the team has options if Humphries retires—drafting Tennessee's **Peyton Manning** or Washington State's **Ryan Leaf**, if the junior comes out early. "It certainly is a position, and opportunity, we have to look at very closely," coach **Kevin Gilbride** says. "It's exciting when you hear some of the things (about Manning and Leaf). ... Everything we've heard is they're supposed to be two franchise-type quarterbacks."

**FINAL THOUGHTS:** Gilbride has mixed feelings about the end of his rookie season, which finished with an eight-game losing streak. "I'm glad (it's over) because when you are losing, you don't enjoy that part of it," he says. "But as a competitor, you never want it to end when it's not going how you like it to go." Despite the poor record, Gilbride is pleased with his coaching staff's ability to handle a difficult situation and to keep the team motivated. ... Guard **Joe Coccozzo** underwent rotator cuff surgery on his right shoulder. —*Jay Paris*

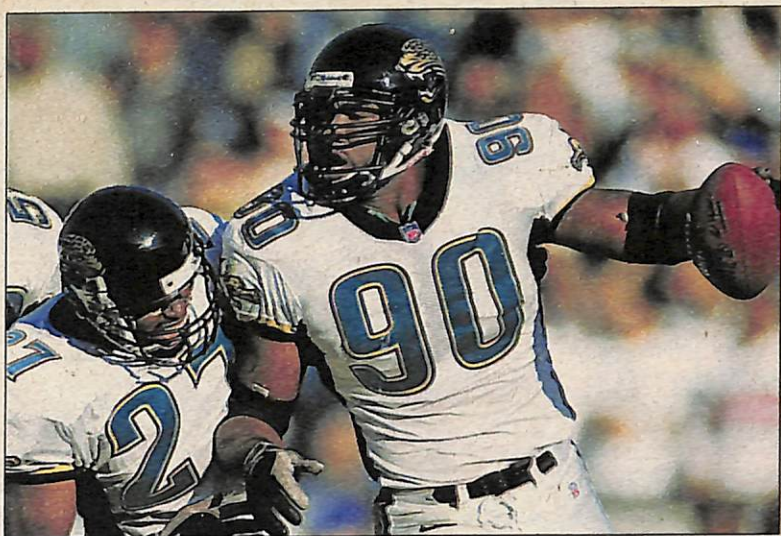
## Colts



**THE FOUNDATION:** One of the main reasons a team that reached the AFC title game in 1995 slipped to 3-13 this year is the steady decline of its offensive line. Of the five starters in 1995, only right tackle **Jason Mathews** remains, and he's primarily a backup who may not return next season. Erratic play limited the effectiveness of running back **Marshall Faulk** and tested the durability of quarterbacks **Jim Harbaugh** and **Paul Justin**. The foundation for the future rests with **Jay Leeuwenburg**, guard **Tarik Glenn** and tackle **Adam Meadows**. Leeuwenburg was solid in his first year at center, but Glenn and Meadows, who each started 16 games as a rookie, endured growing pains. Meadows had trouble dealing with speed rushers at the corner. Glenn got better as the season progressed, but the team wasn't satisfied with his conditioning. ... A wild card on the offensive line is guard **Eric Mahlum**, who missed the entire season and has played in 13 games the last two years because of a knee injury. He had surgery in December, and his full recovery would enable the team to move Glenn to right tackle.

**SILENT PARTNER:** One of the quiet contributors from last year's draft class was defensive back **Delmonico Montgomery**. He saw action in all 16 games as the coaching staff utilized his athleticism against the slot receiver in nickel situations before starting him at cornerback the final three games. Montgomery finished the season with 23 tackles, a sack and five defended passes. His strong rookie season makes him the favorite to fill a starting role opposite **Carlton Gray**. —*Mike Chappell*





**NO SECOND HELPINGS:** Brackens (above) and fellow second-year players on the Jaguars' defense struggled to duplicate rookie feats because of injuries.

## Jaguars



**THE MEANS MATTER:** With the signing of end Joel Smeenge to a three-year contract extension, the team has only to deal with **Natrone Means** as an unrestricted free agent. The organization wants Means back, but only at a

reasonable price. To Means, that's a deal in the \$2.5 million to \$3 million range, and that may be more than the club is willing to give. The running back did not have a 100-yard game in 1997 but was slowed by ankle problems. If Means signs elsewhere, the team will search for a replacement. But don't expect a big-bucks free agent because the defense needs shoring up, too.

**SOPHOMORE SLUMP:** One of the disappointments for coach **Tom Coughlin** was that three second-year players—end **Tony Brackens**, linebacker **Kevin Hardy** and cornerback **Aaron Beasley**—all had progress stunted by injuries. Coughlin says it's imperative for the three to bounce back next season if there is to be improvement on the defensive side. ... The emergence of tight end **Damon Jones** will give the team another weapon to build upon next season. ... Coughlin reiterated last week that finding a top cover cornerback was one of the offseason's top priorities. One solution would be to use **Rob Johnson** as trade bait and work a deal for a higher draft pick that could lead to a cornerback. "I think we have to have somebody who can say, 'One-on-one, I'm stopping you,'" Coughlin says. The team already plans to bring back **Dave Thomas**, **Deon Figures** and **Beasley**, all of whom were slowed by injuries this season. —*Pete Prisco*

## Patriots



**RUNNING GAME WANTED:** The Patriots are looking for a running game as they begin their offseason following a 7-6 playoff loss to the Steelers. Not having **Curtis Martin** (abdominal tear) over the last five weeks was a disaster. But even with Martin in the lineup, the running game never dominated, despite a restructuring of the offensive line. The scheme was more finesse than power, and the fullbacks were unable to make the necessary lead blocks up

front. "We just weren't a physical team this year," fullback **Sam Gash** said. "We just didn't line up and smashmouth people the way we did last year." ... Even though this is the coaching staff's first year together, head coach **Pete Carroll** is considering a restructuring of the unit.

**SIGNINGS COMING:** The team has several key players who will become free agents at the end of the month. Martin rejected a six-year, \$18 million deal at the beginning of the season, and now he wants to sign a shorter deal. Martin, who says he wants to return to the Patriots, faces surgery to repair his abdomen tear. Defensive end **Willie McGinest** will command a huge contract, something that might not be justified given his production this season. Also unsigned are starters **Bruce Armstrong**, **Jimmy Hitchcock**, **Max Lane**, **Todd Rucci**, **David Wohlabaugh**, **Gash** and **Keith Byars**. ... Rookie **Sedrick Shaw**, although he could gain only 22 yards on 10 carries against Pittsburgh, showed some flash and dash and was willing to block. If nothing else, the team has a dependable backup to Martin for next season. —*Kevin Mannix*

## Dolphins



**TAKING BLAME:** In a contrite postseason analysis, coach **Jimmy Johnson** took the blame for many of the team's offensive woes. "I screwed up," Johnson says. "The mistake I made is I felt I could concentrate on defense and special teams. ... I felt like if we kept the (offensive) system the same with maybe my emphasis on trying to run the ball within the system, it would get done. I was wrong." Before making changes, Johnson says he will "pull back"

for at least a week or two so that he doesn't make an emotional decision. Johnson also is waiting to see what happens around the league, particularly in Dallas, where the offensive staff expects to be fired. That means Cowboys offensive coordinator **Ernie Zampese** and offensive line coach **Hudson Houck**, two coaches Johnson respects immensely, could be available. Johnson wanted to hire Zampese instead of **Norv Turner** in 1991, but Zampese couldn't get out of his contract with the Rams. Zampese is expected to replace offensive coordinator **Gary Stevens** when Stevens is fired. Offensive line coach **Larry Beightol** could be a casualty if Houck is available.

**HOT WATER:** It may not have taken running back **Lawrence Phillips** long to get in trouble with the team. Phillips was the only player to miss a physical the day after the team returned from its playoff game at New England. Phillips was supposedly still in South Florida, but the team couldn't find him. Phillips was inactive for the game because of shoulder and neck injuries. In November, Johnson said he thought Phillips would require minor surgery on his left knee after the season. —*Jason Cole*

## Jets



**3-4 OR 4-3?** One item on the offseason agenda is to determine the 1998 defensive scheme. Will the Jets stick with a 3-4 scheme or return to a 4-3 alignment? After spending the entire preseason in a 4-3, they switched to a 3-4 in the

second regular-season game. You couldn't argue with the results (the Jets allowed 278 points, tied for second-fewest in the AFC), but the switch made life miserable for right end **Hugh Douglas**, a speed rusher who was handcuffed in the 3-4 scheme. The 260-pound Douglas finished with only four sacks. The coaching staff made the switch because it felt the strength of the defense was at linebacker. Sound reasoning, but now it's time to make a long-term commitment. The development of rookie tackles **Jason Ferguson** and **Rick Terry** could prompt a return to the 4-3. The team also could add another lineman via free agency. If, for some reason, the coaches decide to stay in a three-man line, they should try to trade Douglas, who wouldn't fit in. Douglas, entering the final year of his contract, would generate major interest in the trade market.

**PASSING THE TORCH:** The coaching staff was expected to coach at the Senior Bowl in Mobile, Ala., but it was replaced by the Ravens' staff. That was fine by **Bill Parcells**, who wasn't enthusiastic about the potential assignment. Parcells, adhering to a hectic schedule since being hired last February, is looking forward to a slower pace in January. But this isn't vacation time for the Jets' boss, who is planning to evaluate personnel this month. —*Rich Cimini*

## Oilers



**OUT OF SIGHT:** Even the offseason conditioning program has the team's move from Houston hanging over it. Most of the players lived in Houston full time last year, and relatively few have moved to

Tennessee. And for a team trying to escape its middle-of-the-pack status, this is really no time to have another built-in excuse for failure. The players who choose to work on their own outside of Nashville were left with the message of what would be waiting for them when they returned for minicamp. "There will be changes; 8-8 is not what we want," coach **Jeff Fisher** says. "We're going to bring people in here who will make a difference. If they want to be a part of it, they need to pay the price. If not, they can move on. It's that simple."

**RETURN ENGAGEMENT:** Guard **Bruce Matthews**, who just completed his 15th season with the team, says it's harder physically to keep going week to week, but he would like to return next season. Matthews, still good enough to be named to his 10th Pro Bowl this season, usually ends the season by saying he will think about the future. There is little chance he would not return, but he says his physical condition now is an issue. "It's hard to focus sometimes," he says, "because physically I don't feel like I once did." Matthews, who has started every game since the beginning of the 1988 season, almost ended his streak with a knee injury this season. Still one of the first players at practice every day, his calming yet determined influence is felt everywhere on a young team. —*Jeff Legwold*

## Raiders



**ANOTHER SEARCH?:** If the team dismisses **Joe Bugel**, look for Vikings coach **Dennis Green** to surface as the leading candidate for the job. He probably will not return to Minnesota, where he won few friends on the team's ownership board with his controversial autobiography. Green reportedly covets the idea of joining the team, provided **Al Davis** gives him power on personnel decisions. That's a big catch; such authority has rested with Davis

the past 35 years. If Davis is unwilling to relinquish some authority, he should forget about Green and former 49ers coach **George Seifert**. If Davis remains active in day-to-day decisions, the list of potential coaches could include Eagles offensive coordinator **Jon Gruden**, former USC and Rams coach **John Robinson** and former Raiders coach **Tom Flores**.

**BROWN'S EXIT:** Cornerback **Larry Brown**, a huge disappointment since signing a five-year, \$12.5 million contract in February 1996, does not expect to return for his third season with the team. Brown stepped on the field for only 15 plays in '97. He never played after the team suspended him October 14. Brown says 15 plays do not represent a fair opportunity. "I will play again somewhere," he says. "I will be making plays and doing the things I was doing before I got here." ... Brown's impending exit underscores problems at cornerback. The team's best corner the past two seasons, **Albert Lewis**, might retire. **Terry McDaniel**'s performance has dropped off, leaving his future in doubt. —*Ron Kroichick*



## Ravens



**KELLY WATCH:** Addressing the quarterback situation is the No. 1 offseason priority and the team is expected to talk to **Jim Kelly** soon. Coach **Ted Marchibroda** formerly was quarterbacks coach and offensive coordinator in Buffalo, where he worked with Kelly. Kelly, who retired after the 1996 season, knows Marchibroda's offense and would provide the team with the leadership it desperately needed this season. But a lot of NFL coaches and scouts feel Kelly's passes have lost zip and his dropback is slow. Marchibroda leans toward signing Kelly, if possible, but several front-office executives prefer drafting a franchise quarterback such as **Peyton Manning** or **Ryan Leaf**. Owner **Art Modell** has spoken with the Colts about the Ravens trading up from the No. 10 spot to No. 1 and plans to contact the Cardinals, who draft second. **Vinny Testaverde** would remain with the team but probably would demand a trade if Kelly were signed.

**QUESTION ABOUT GRAHAM:** The team is not totally sold on **Jay Graham** as its running back of the future and will look to upgrade the position in the draft or free agency. Graham rushed for 154 yards in his first start, against the Eagles November 16, but never recovered from a bruised bone in his ankle. Privately, some members of the team, including teammates, question Graham's threshold for pain. ... The top three priorities among unrestricted free agents the team wants to resign are center **Wally Williams**, cornerback **Antonio Langham** and receiver **Derrick Alexander**. —Mike Preston

## Bears



**DEFENSIVE PLANS:** The No. 1 lock as far as personnel decisions appears to be the dealing of defensive end **Alonzo Spellman**, whose relationship with the coach likely is irreparable. The real looming question is what the Spellman-less Bears will do. **Mark Thomas** nailed down the starting left end job with a big second half after **John Thierry** was injured. The team also is unsettled at linebacker, especially at strongside where **Ron Cox** is solid but 30, unrestricted and looking for far more money than the team is interested in paying. If the team is willing to commit to a front seven, it will go after **Andre Wadsworth** with the fifth pick in the draft to take Spellman's slot, beat the pack to **Dana Stubblefield** and work Thierry at strongside linebacker where his 4.55 speed is enough to pursue. ... Look for the team to keep either **Chris Gray** or **Todd Burger** but not both. The Bears like Burger as a swing guard/center, but Burger wants starter money. Former Jet **Casey Wiegman** was out with a shoulder injury virtually all year after signing and could be inexpensive depth if Burger balks. **Chris Villarrial** is starter-grade at center or guard, giving coaches some built-in flexibility.

**QB TALK:** Don't be shocked by whispers of team's interest in **Dan Marino**, if he's available and willing to consider a fresh, late-career start. Coach **Dave Wannstedt** and **Jimmy Johnson** still talk often, and could offer solutions to each other's problems. The team is wide open at quarterback and has running back **Rashaan Salaam** to deal, and Johnson needs a feature back. —John Mullin

## Buccaneers



**BRIGHT FUTURE:** Within minutes after the NFC playoff loss to Green Bay, the team already was talking about next season. The team had its best season since 1979, and there's no need to worry about the roster being rummaged in the offseason. Some shrewd maneuvering by the front office has the team in very good shape for the next few years. Only three starters are potential free agents because the team signed the players it most feared losing—**Derrick Brooks**, **John Lynch**, **Brad Culpepper**, **Karl Williams** and **Jorge Diaz**—to contract extensions during the season. Free safety **Charles Mincy**, guard **Jim Pyne** and tight end **Jackie Harris** can become free agents in February. It's almost a certainty the injury-plagued Harris will not be back. Close to the salary cap because of the extensions, the team faces tough decisions on Pyne and Mincy. ... Only five starters are 30 or older. Nine of the regular starters either were rookies or second-year players.

**EXTENSION TALKS:** Defensive tackle **Warren Sapp**, who doesn't become a free agent until after the 1998 season, helped his negotiating position with a huge game against Green Bay. Sapp had three sacks and forced a two fumbles. Negotiations on a contract extension had been stalled since mid-November but are expected to heat up again in the next few weeks. The team also is likely to begin a serious effort to work out an extension for fullback **Mike Alstott**, who has two seasons left on his current contract. —Pat Yasinskas

## Seahawks



**BENNIE WILL BE BACK:** Even though he has three bulging disks, safety **Bennie Blades** was told by doctors he would need rest and not surgery. That's good news for the depth of the team's defense. In Blades' absence, the team developed **Jay Bellamy**, who showed the speed on blitzes and coverage ability to be a competent starter. With Blades and Bellamy, the team would have a one-two punch. Blades brings an attitude to the defense. He's an impact hitter and smart leader, and his ability to play near the line of scrimmage helps against the run. ... Though Blades' return should be a given, there is some uncertainty regarding his brother, receiver **Brian Blades**. **Mike Pritchard** and **Joey Galloway** have taken the starting jobs, and unsigned **James McKnight** is a big-play third receiver. The team can probably afford to keep Blades if he takes a pay cut to near the minimum, but that may be tough to ask of the second-best receiver in team history. Blades is under contract.

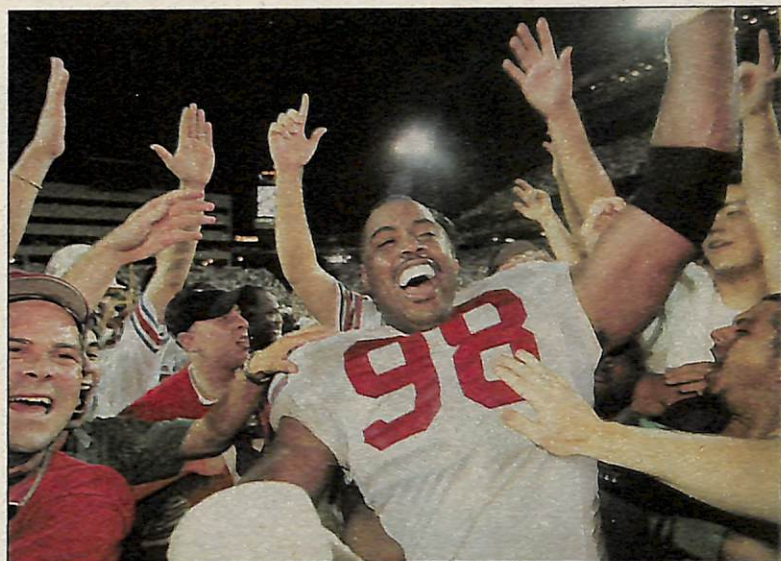
**SURGERY UPDATE:** After a season filled with broken bones, the team escaped the early offseason without major problems. Linebackers **Dean Wells** and **Michael Barber**, tight end **Christian Fauria**, defensive end **Phillip Daniels**, McKnight and defensive tackle **Sam Adams** needed surgeries to remove bone spurs in their ankles. Perhaps the biggest surprise is that right tackle **Howard Ballard** didn't need knee surgery. The team also received good news on Adams, who walked off the field in the second half of the finale with a knee injury. Adams only suffered a bone bruise. —John Clayton

## Steelers



**REPEAT PERFORMANCE:** Look for the team to try a tactic similar to the one they used in their first game against the Broncos, when receiver **Charles Johnson** mainly was used to block safety **Steve Atwater**. The team wanted to make sure it had a blocker on every man when the Broncos lined eight players in the box to stop **Jerome Bettis**. Johnson would go in motion and stop at the spot where Atwater was positioned across the line of scrimmage. Atwater tried to counter the tactic by blitzing through a different hole between center and guard. ... Bettis gained 67 yards on 25 carries against the Patriots, his worst performance since he managed 63 yards on 15 carries in the season opener against the Cowboys. But he insisted his sore knee was fine. He didn't wear a brace against the Patriots and won't wear one against the Broncos.

**THE TERRELL DAVIS FACTOR:** Defensive coordinator **Jim Haslett** wanted to increase the pressure generated from his front line and instructed them to "pin their ears back and go" after the Patriots. Part of the reason was because the Steelers didn't have to worry about the run as much, with **Curtis Martin** injured and out of the game. They probably cannot take the same approach Sunday against the Broncos because of **Terrell Davis**. The team did a good job on Davis last month, limiting him to 75 yards on 21 carries. The defensive line will have to go back to filling the rush lanes and engaging the offensive lineman in order to create room for the linebackers to make tackles. —Gerry Dulac



STAY OR GO? Swann's consistency has hardly been that of a franchise player.

## Cardinals



**SWANN'S SONG:** There is little doubt that the club will keep a franchise tag on defensive tackle **Eric Swann**, but that doesn't necessarily mean he's guaranteed to be with the team in '98. When Swann is healthy, he is one of the elite at his position. But Swann never seems to get the job done for an entire season, and that is a concern when trying to determine whether to shell out about \$4.5 million per season and put a strain on the team's cap number. What the club has to decide is whether it's worth the gamble that Swann will stay healthy and focused. The club has agreed not to put the exclusive franchise tag on Swann, which differs from a regular franchise designation. That means he can test the market and get an offer sheet. The club would get two first-round picks as compensation if it chooses not to match an offer. If he is franchised and does not get another offer, Swann will get the average of the top five players at his position or 120 percent of his current \$3.5 million salary, which would be \$4.2 million.

**WHAT TO DO WITH NO. 2?** The club used its first pick the past two seasons on defensive players (**Simeon Rice**, No. 3 in '96; **Tom Knight**, No. 9 in '97). The consensus is that offense is the greatest need this time, specifically running back. But with Florida State defensive end **Andre Wadsworth** and Heisman Trophy winner **Charles Woodson** of Michigan expected to be available at No. 2, the club might have to go defense again if it doesn't trade down. It could solve the running back problem in free agency or with a second-round pick. The club also needs offensive linemen. —Lee Shappell



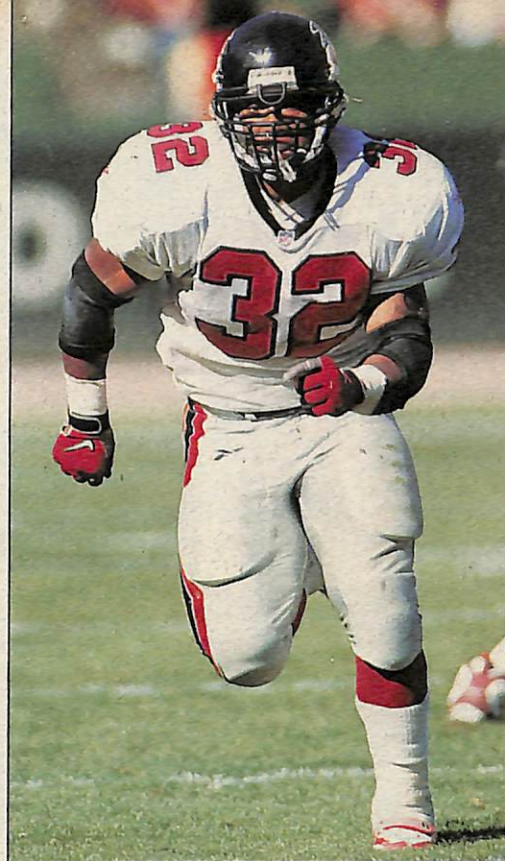
## Cowboys



**JUMP-START OFFENSE:** No matter what decisions owner **Jerry Jones** makes concerning his coaching staff, the team must repair its offense if it is to once again contend for the NFC East Division title. The team finished a

disappointing 20th in total offense in 1997. And this really wasn't a one-year aberration. This has been a continuation. The team ranked 24th in offense two years ago. In fact, the Cowboys have been scoring points at a dramatically reduced rate after they began the 1995 season with an 8-1 record. In the succeeding 39 regular-season games, they failed to score more than 21 points 25 times. And this from an offense that averaged 25.9 points a game in 1994. Only six times in '97 did the Cowboys score more than 21 points. The lack of a consistent running game and deteriorating pass protection were the main culprits.

**HAIL CAMPO:** Despite its final-month debacle, the team had the second-best defense in the NFL. That is quite a tribute to defensive coordinator **Dave Campo**, who spent much of the '97 season compensating for the 13-game absence of suspended defensive tackle **Leon Lett** and the lack of a pass rush from his front four. Campo's unit had given up only 15 points a game through the first half of the Green Bay game on November 23. But two late Packers touchdowns, and then the loss of cornerback **Deion Sanders** because of an injury the following game, caused that figure to double over the final 4½ games of the season (and the team was 0-4 without Prime Time). —Mickey Spagnola



**NO GUARANTEES:** Even Anderson (above) would get competition at running back in Reeves' system.

## Falcons



**TALENT SEARCH:** Coach **Dan Reeves** is as interested in upgrading overall talent as he is in addressing the team's most obvious needs. Only one player was selected to the Pro Bowl, and that was linebacker **Jessie Tuggle**, 32, who made it largely on reputation. Although defensive end **Chuck Smith** and probably linebacker **Cornelius Bennett** should have been, the team has few other players who rate among the league's best. Reeves wants to

bring in players to compete for jobs even at positions that are strengths, such as running back, where **Jamal Anderson** and **Byron Hanspard** offer a solid one-two punch; free safety, where **Devin Bush** needs to show more consistency; and tight end, where **O.J. Santiago** appears to have star potential. "One of the biggest motivators in this game is the fear of losing your starting job," Reeves says. "That's the kind of competition we want to have."

**A KEEPER:** The team held onto its best practice-squad player, signing defensive end **Barry Mitchell** in its first postseason move. Mitchell had a good camp last summer after signing as an undrafted free agent out of Idaho. Defensive end will be one of the toughest positions on the team to earn a job, though, with **Smith**, **Lester Archambeau**, **Anthony Pleasant** and **John Burroughs** returning. ... Reeves reiterates he doesn't plan any changes on his coaching staff unless openings occur via attrition. "I'm extremely happy," Reeves says. "We'll only get better if we are able to keep this core of coaches together." —Tony Fabrizio

## Giants



**NO QUICK FIXES:** The coaches and front office will wait until the emotions of the first-round playoff collapse subside before making most of the decisions on personnel. Don't expect any major changes in the offseason, though. In keeping with the philosophy of outgoing G.M. **George Young**, coach **Jim Fassel** does not believe in bringing in many free agents in search of quick fixes. He says he has worked too hard with the current players to

teach them his system and approach and does not want to start from scratch. That doesn't mean there won't be any additions, though. The team definitely will look for help at receiver, with the Steelers' **Yancey Thigpen** one possible target. The draft might offer help, but the team doesn't pick until 24th overall.

**WHO WILL RETURN?** Of the team's four most prominent unrestricted free agents—safety **Tito Wooten**, kicker **Brad Daluiso**, cornerback **Thomas Randolph** and wide receiver **Thomas Lewis**—the team has some interest in retaining all but Lewis. But it might be tough to keep Randolph because he would remain a backup and has the potential to start elsewhere. Keeping Wooten may be tough because other teams in need of safeties might offer generous deals. But Wooten says he would like to stay. ... **Ike Hilliard** says he is on schedule to be at 100 percent in time for training camp, which would be a huge boost to the passing game. Hilliard started the opener but was lost for the season when a neck injury in Week 2 led to season-ending spinal surgery. Hilliard hasn't been cleared for full weightlifting and conditioning work. —Neil Best

## Eagles



**ONLY TWO?** Owner **Jeffrey Lurie** drew some smirks when, at the conclusion of the team's 6-9-1 season, he said the only two teams in the NFC "clearly ahead" of the Eagles were the Packers and 49ers. The team's position in the draft (11th pick overall), third-place finish in the dreadful NFC East and 4-8 record against NFC opponents says there may be a few more teams ahead of them in the conference.

**SHAPE UP:** One of coach **Ray Rhodes'** major changes this offseason will be the team's workout program. The coach has demanded that more players participate. One player Rhodes probably had in mind was center **Steve Everitt**, who had a disappointing season and never appeared to be in shape all season long. Another player Rhodes would like to see often is tight end **Jason Dunn**. ... If, as expected, the team loses running backs **Ricky Watters** and **Charlie Garner** to free agency, one player to keep in mind as a replacement is the Packers' **Edgar Bennett**, another unrestricted free agent, who is coming off Achilles' tendon surgery. Bennett, who gained over 1,799 yards in 1995, would be a good fit in the club's fourth attempt to run the West Coast offense, and would complement fullback **Kevin Turner** and **Duce Staley** in the team's three-pronged running attack. ... Don't expect starting guard **Joe Panos**, another free agent, to return next season. It won't be a big loss. Panos plays hard but is no more than an average guard who gets handled easily by the big-time defensive tackles in the league. —Mark Eckel

## 49ers



**GRIND IT OUT:** The team's chances of beating Green Bay took a big step forward with the news that running back **Garrison Hearst** would return for the NFC championship game. Team doctors felt Hearst would have had a 50-50 chance of reinjuring his shoulder had he played last Sunday against Minnesota. With eight days' rest before the NFC title game, they are ready to clear Hearst. His return is critical. The Packers ranked 20th in the

league in run defense and have provided evidence they can be beaten on the ground. Hearst was consistently quick all season in hitting holes, and the team's offensive line played well against Minnesota, especially right guard **Kevin Gogan** and right tackle **Kirk Scrafford**. Fullback **William Floyd** also is having a strong season blocking, and rookie tight end **Greg Clark** is a large part of the team's rushing success. The team has worn down more than one opponent on the ground—strange as that sounds for a West Coast passing team. The team will even carry out that plan should Hearst suffer a setback with his shoulder, because backup **Terry Kirby** dramatically raised his level of play in the win over the Vikings.

**MANAGED CARE:** **Steve Young**, who will make his 16th consecutive start Sunday, credits the conservative plan of coach **Steve Mariucci** for his health. Young rushed for the fewest yards since he became the starter in 1991. When he does run, Young is sliding far short of tacklers. But his scrambling remains a weapon. With four carries for 37 yards against Minnesota, Young rushed for three first downs. —Brian Murphy

## Lions



**CARRYING THE LOAD:** Free safety **Mark Carrier** was a key figure in the team's improvement from 5-11 in 1996 to 9-7. Not only did he lead the team with five interceptions and rank third in tackles, but he pulled together a secondary that included two rookie corners and should only get better. The team got far more from Carrier than expected when he was signed as a free agent. "Mark was a great addition," defensive coordinator **Larry Peccatiello** says. "God only knows where we would have been without him." ... Another player who came through was **Jason Hanson**, who regained a sense of invincibility by putting together a streak of 24 consecutive field goals and earning a Pro Bowl berth. In light duty in '96, Hanson made 12-of-17 field-goal attempts.

**HOT CORNER:** Cornerback **Bryant Westbrook** wouldn't back down during his rookie season and flashed Pro Bowl potential. "I'm as impressed with Westbrook as I've been with any young corner in the league," Bucs quarterback **Trent Dilfer** says. "Nothing seems to bother him, and he'll be one of the better players in the league for a long time." The other rookie corner, **Kevin Abrams**, experienced some bumps but showed signs that he will be able to smooth out his game. ... Offensive tackle **Juan Roque**, another member of a solid rookie class, has the size (6-8, 333) and attitude to become a dominant player. ... Fullback **Tommy Vardell** did a strong job as a blocker to make the two-back system work, but the team would be wise to utilize him more as a receiver and runner. —Steve Kornacki



## Packers



**MIRROR IMAGE:** What makes the Green Bay-San Francisco matchup so intriguing is it is a reverse image of the one two years ago in San Francisco, when the Packers upset the 49ers, 27-17. **Mike Holmgren** was the pupil of the 49ers' system who used his vast knowledge of their scheme and personnel to pull the upset. Now **Steve Mariucci**, Holmgren's former pupil in Green Bay, will try to use his vast knowledge of the Packers' system and its personnel—particularly quarterback **Brett Favre**—to beat Holmgren. If there is anyone who knows Favre's strengths and weaknesses, it is Mariucci, who was Favre's first quarterback coach in Green Bay.

**THE MIDDLE MEN:** Paramount to the team's chances Sunday is stopping the defensive tackle duo of **Dana Stubblefield** and **Bryant Young**, who had to be drooling after watching **Warren Sapp** register three sacks and force two fumbles last Sunday. Running backs **Dorsey Levens** and **William Henderson** likely will have to be held in as blockers, which the Packers don't like to do. ... **Gilbert Brown** returned and was a major factor in holding Tampa Bay to 90 yards rushing, but he aggravated his right ankle. Also, defensive end **Gabe Wilkins** injured his knee. If he can't play, **Paul Frase** will take his place, with **Keith McKenzie** lining up in passing situations. ... The debut of **Antonio Freeman** and **Robert Brooks** as returners was a success. Brooks had a 28-yard punt return that helped set up a first-half field goal. Freeman had a 90-yard kickoff return for a touchdown called back because of a holding penalty. —*Tom Silverstein*

## Rams



**ROSTER SHAKEDOWN:** The team has 13 players, including defensive tackle **Bill Johnson**, running back **Amp Lee** and cornerback **Ryan McNeil**, scheduled for unrestricted free agency. Johnson was a pleasant surprise in the middle—a credible run stopper who also provided a decent inside push in the pass rush. Lee, who led all NFL running backs in receptions (61), was voted the team MVP and seems to be a perfect fit for offensive coordinator **Jerry Rhyme's** system as a third-down back. McNeil led the NFL in interceptions (nine), but also was beaten deep several times and was flagged for his share of pass interference penalties. Coach **Dick Vermeil** wants to re-sign McNeil, but the team may balk if the price tag gets too high. Among the team's other unrestricted free agents, veteran quarterback **Mark Rypien** fits Rhyme's offense like a comfortable slipper and probably will be brought back to be the backup.

**MORE ON McNEIL:** The team must decide if it is worth paying a premium on McNeil, who says he is taking a businesslike approach to free agency and likely will ask for a multiyear deal worth \$2 to \$3 million a year. Without McNeil, the team could start **Dexter McCleon** or **Taje Allen** at right cornerback. But neither displayed the kind of consistent work as a rookie to make one think he could step into the starting lineup. Other options include the draft or signing a moderately priced free agent. Keep in mind that McNeil didn't sign until July 7 last year, so the team may not want to risk waiting on him. —*Jim Thomas*

## Saints



**INTERESTING CALL:** The club declined to exercise its option for right of first refusal on **Randal Hill**, who led the team in receptions (55) and receiving yards (761). Hill opted at the end of the season to become an unrestricted free agent February 13 after achieving performance incentives that allowed him to void the 1998 portion of his two-year contract, which would have paid him \$450,000. The club could have paid Hill \$87,500 and retained its right to match any offer Hill received; instead, it sent a signal that it won't enter into a bidding war to retain Hill's services. G.M. **Bill Kuharich** will set a ceiling on re-signing Hill—probably no more than \$700,000 a year. Hill will seek a seven-figure salary. "This does not mean we don't want Randal back because we do," Kuharich says. Hill's talent is better suited to filling the role of a No. 2 or No. 3 wideout. In upgrading the wide receiver position, help could come from **Alvin Harper**, who was claimed off waivers from the Redskins near the end of the season and is under contract for two more seasons.

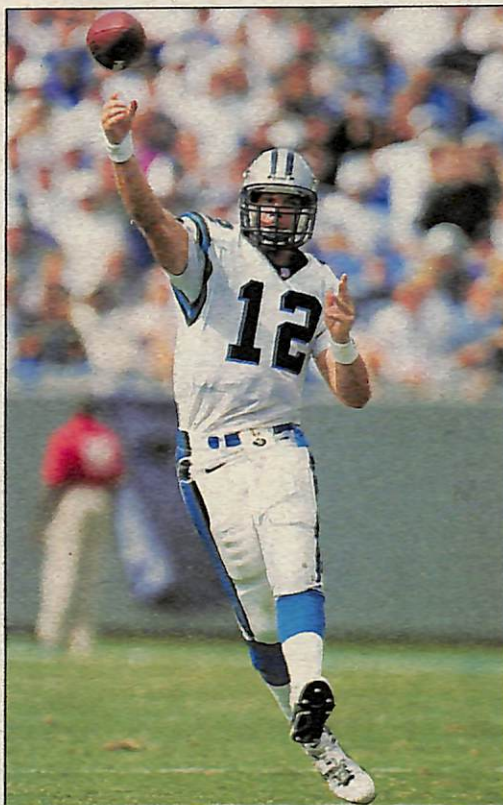
**GOOD MOVE:** As a hedge against losing Hill and fellow starter **Andre Hastings**, the team re-signed kick returner/wide receiver **Eric Guliford** to a two-year contract. Guliford was the team's No. 3 wide receiver and ranked third in the NFL in kickoff returns. Starting defensive tackle **Pio Sagapolutele**, punter **Mark Royals** and **Kendall Gammon**—called by coach **Mike Ditka** "the best deep snapper I've ever seen"—also were re-signed. All three would have been free agents. —*Mike Strom*

## Panthers



**DECISIONS, DECISIONS:** Deciding whether to give quarterback **Kerry Collins** a \$6 million bonus to keep him around another three years is only one of the tough tasks facing management in the offseason. Special teams standout **Michael Bates**, who was voted to the Pro Bowl for the second consecutive year as a kick returner, will become an unrestricted free agent February 13 if he remains unsigned. Bates not only is valuable as an explosive kick returner, but also as a cover man on special teams. Re-signing him is one of the top priorities. A decision on Collins is due by January 15.

**FILLING HOLES:** Although **Micheal Barrow** led the team in sacks with 8½, he did not prove he was worth \$18.75 million. He missed far too many tackles on what could have been big, momentum-swinging type plays in critical situations. Part of Barrow's problem was that he was signed to play inside linebacker and then was forced to switch to the outside because of the **Kevin Greene** fiasco. If the right guy comes available and the money is there, look for management to sign another outside linebacker in free agency and for Barrow to move back inside where he belongs. That's what former G.M. **Bill Polian** and coach **Dom Capers** had in mind when **Renaldo Turnbull** was signed last August, but Turnbull didn't work out. If **Lamar Lathon** can stay healthy and get another top player lined up opposite him, maybe he really can become the consistent force he should be after a disappointing season that included a number of nagging injuries and two sacks. —*Joe Menzer*



**\$6 MILLION QUESTION:** It's a stretch to say that Collins' performance earned him three more years.

## Redskins



**HOSS WANTS TO BE BOSS:** Jeff Hostetler wants the opportunity to compete for the starting quarterback job. But he has been told by coach **Norv Turner** that as long as **Gus Frerotte** makes a full recovery from a broken hip—and the team expects him to—Frerotte will go to training camp as the starter and there will be no open competition for the job. Hostetler was supportive of Frerotte all through the regular season, but with each passing week, and with each new struggle on offense, Hostetler's frustration grew. If he can't compete for the starting job, Hostetler would like to go elsewhere. He still has two years left on his contract, though, and the team would have to release him. The team needs a dependable backup, and until someone else surfaces, Hostetler is the best for that job. If Hostetler can't compete for the starting job and can't persuade the team to set him free, he might retire.

**UNDER THE KNIFE:** So far, the team has gotten off relatively lightly in terms of offseason surgery. Tight end **Jamie Asher** needs arthroscopic surgery on his knee. Center **Jeff Uhlenhake** faces the most serious surgery, a reconstruction of the anterior cruciate ligament in his knee. The team would like to have Uhlenhake back. But if he decides his knee won't take another season, **Cory Raymer** is ready to take over. ... Surgery on left guard **Tre Johnson's** left shoulder was successful. Johnson might need surgery on his right shoulder again, but the team says it is holding off on that for now. —*Paul Woody*

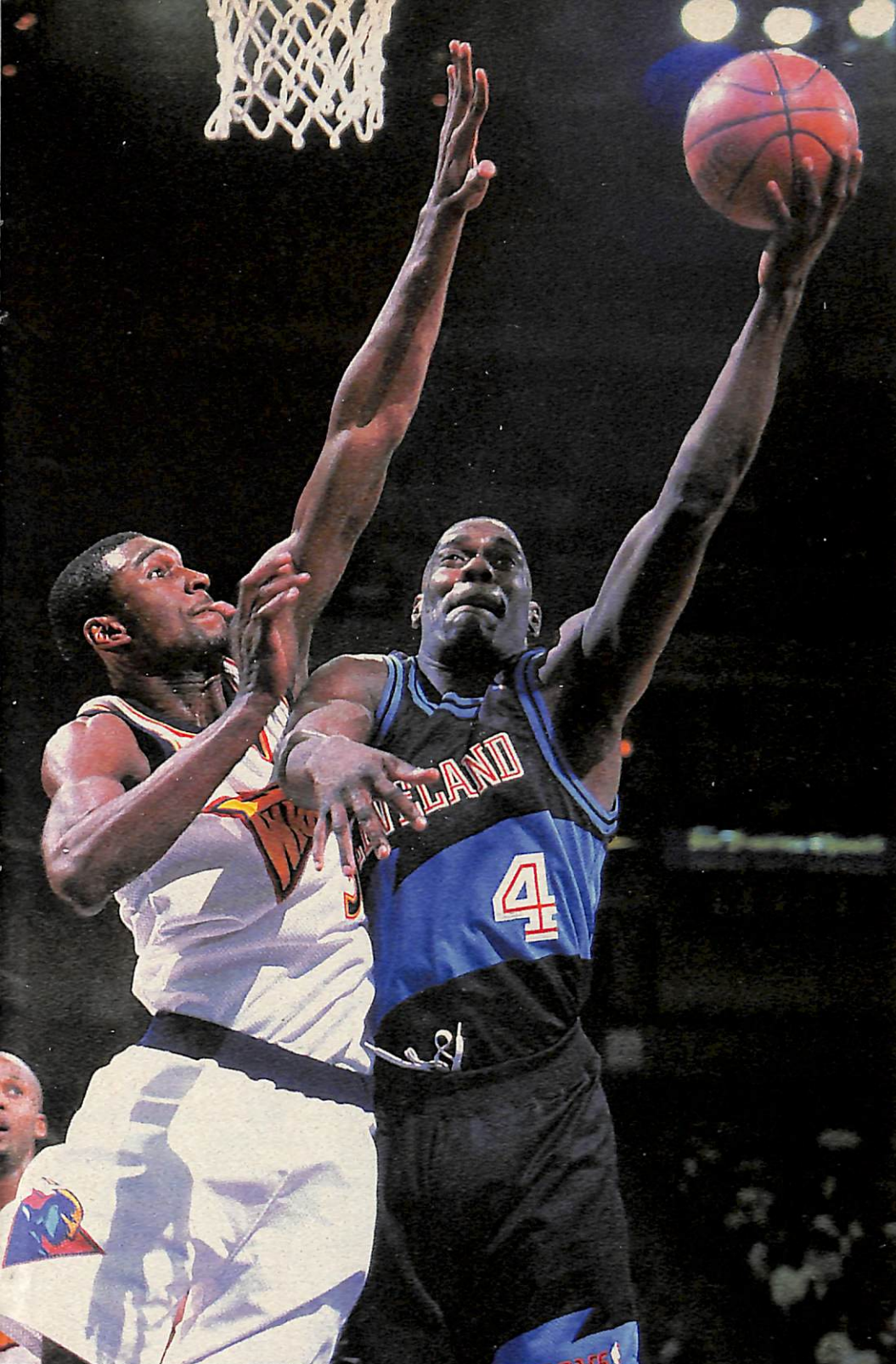
## Vikings



**QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS:** The team's 38-22 playoff loss to the 49ers was barely final when the questions started flying in the locker room. Will coach **Dennis Green** return for a seventh season? Will the uncertainty of Green's status affect contract negotiations with key free agents such as running back **Robert Smith**, defensive tackle **John Randle** and offensive tackle **Todd Steussie**? And what are the plans of quarterback **Randal Cunningham**, who might have created a market for himself elsewhere as a starter with his five-game, late-season stint filling in for the injured **Brad Johnson**? Green has one year left on his contract, but he has said he would likely not return without a contract extension beyond 1998. He is interested in listening to offers from teams with coaching vacancies. ... Smith says several factors will affect how he approaches free agency and whether Green returns will "have a huge impact on my decision."

**ONE-YEAR WONDER?** Cunningham says he will wait to see what develops for him this offseason. When he signed with the Vikings last April, after a one-year retirement, he acknowledged that his plan called for a solid, foundation-building season as a backup in '97 with the goal of competing elsewhere for a starting job in '98. ... Middle linebacker **Jeff Brady** (strained quadriceps), who was replaced in the lineup late in the season by weakside linebacker **Ed McDaniel**, almost certainly won't be back. That move created room for rookie **Dwayne Rudd** on the weakside. It is believed the team will keep McDaniel in the middle, leaving Brady as the odd man out. —*Don Banks*





**POWER SURGE:** Kemp, the highest-paid Cavalier, is playing hard, creating open perimeter shots and giving Cleveland someone who can trade bumps with the league's most physical big men.

TODD WARSHAW / ALLSPORT

**Y**ou're going to hear a lot about Shawn Kemp in the next few weeks.

That's because Kemp's Cavaliers face the Sonics twice this month—Thursday in Cleveland, Saturday in Seattle. For January in the NBA, this is about as big as it can get. Not only is it Shawn Kemp's past vs. Shawn Kemp's present, but it's a matchup of arguably the NBA's best team and its biggest surprise.

After going 42-40 last year, the Cavs last week were 17-11 and sitting only two games behind the Bulls. But the Cavs also are exciting, and that's even more shocking. Until this season, they played the game with all the flair of five guys digging a basement. Now Kemp has come to Cleveland, the team is looking more to push the ball and Cavs fans are standing and cheering.

It would be easy to attribute Cleveland's success to Kemp's presence. It would be easy, but it also would be wrong.

The real story about the Cavs' revival is not the Kemp trade, which sent Vin Baker to Seattle and Terrell Brandon and Tyrone Hill to Milwaukee on September 25 after Kemp spent the offseason whining to get out of Seattle. Certainly, Kemp has helped the Cavs, especially in the area of public relations. The marketing people love him because the fans know his name. "Shawn is the first superstar we've had where fans line up just to watch him walk by," forward Danny Ferry says.

But the real reason for the team's success is not Kemp. If Cavaliers president Wayne Embry hadn't used the No. 16 draft pick in last year's draft to take Brevin Knight, you'd still be hearing plenty about the Kemp trade in Cleveland.

Only what you'd hear is how Embry is an idiot.

This is all you need to know about Knight: A case can be made that Brandon is the best point guard in the league.

And the Cavs don't miss him. Not one bit.

"We put the ball in Brevin's hands and see where he will take us," coach Mike Fratello says.

In the NBA, you just don't do that with rookie point guards.

But Knight is different.

He is the best defender of the Cavs' four point guards. Dribble near Knight, and in the wink of an eye he's down the other end of the court with a layup. "He's faster than a pickpocket at the Kentucky Derby," says Pete Newell, the longtime Cavs scout who recommended Knight to Embry.

The first time the Lakers' Nick Van Exel faced Knight, Van Exel shot 1-for-10. In Stephon Marbury's first look at Knight, Marbury took eight shots and missed them all.

Allen Iverson, Mookie Blaylock, Jason Kidd—none has been able to hang Knight's basketball scalp on their belts. Knight, who lately has been playing at less than full strength because of a sprained ankle, is not a big scorer or a reliable outside shooter, but he plays some of the best 10-point games you've ever seen.

Because of his defense.

Because of his speed.

Because of his ballhandling, as his 3-to-1 assist-to-

# A season on the Break

Propelled by exciting new talent, the Cavaliers quickly have distanced themselves from last year's slow-moving style to become the league's biggest surprise **By Terry Pluto**



turnover ratio shows.

And he's only 5-10.

Actually, he's not 5-10. He's 5-10 on his toes.

"Being small is something I've heard about all my life," Knight says. "But I see it as an advantage. I know the big guys can't see me coming when I steal the ball."

**N**o one could have seen Knight—or the Cavs—coming this season.

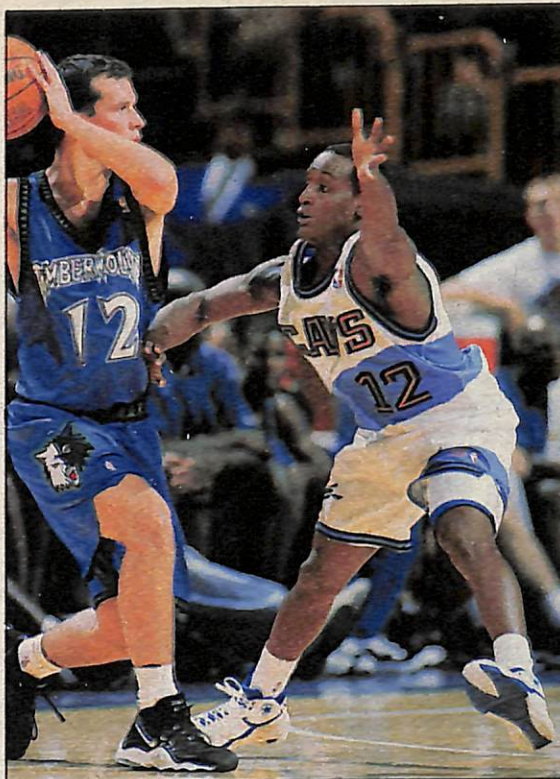
This team starts five players, none of whom were on the active roster a year ago.

It starts three rookies, none drafted higher than Derek Anderson at No. 13. It has a winning record on the road.

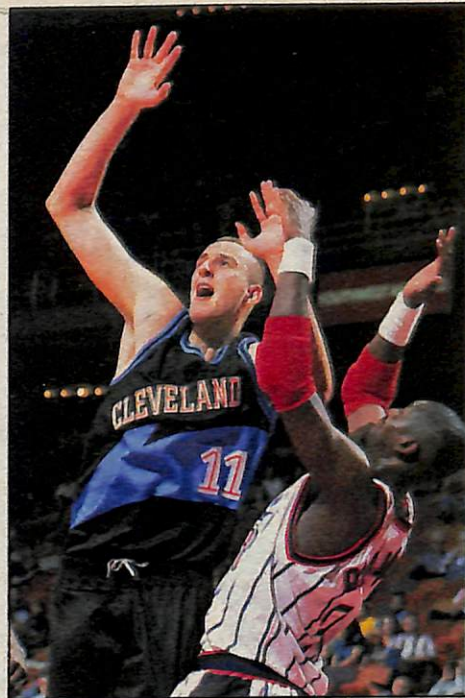
That just isn't supposed to happen. None of this is supposed to happen. Then again, no one expected Embry to shake up the roster and make one shrewd draft pick after another.

Knight may be the best, but the others also glitter.

There is 7-3 Lithuanian Zydrunas Ilgauskas, who was picked by Embry at No. 20 in the first round in 1996. He missed all of last season with a broken foot, but the injury has healed and instead of becoming the next Mel Turpin, Ilgauskas could be the next Rik Smits. Ilgauskas is tall. He has a soft shot. He blocks shots, and he does a decent job on the boards.



ED NESSEN / TSN



ROBERT SEALE / TSN

**TRANSITION GAIN:** Knight (left) and Ilgauskas are two of the new starters who have injected the team with vigor and electricity.

In his first NBA week-end, he faced David Robinson and Hakeem Olajuwon on back-to-back nights. And held his ground.

Add the athletic Anderson and jumping jack Cedric Henderson (the 45th pick this year) to the mix, and the Cavs actually have a run-and-gun team.

One of those guns is Wesley Person. He is the most riveting outside shooter the Cavs have seen since World B. Free, and he has the same conscience.

"With most guys, you say, 'Don't you think you ought to take a couple of steps in and then shoot?'" Fratello says. "Then you see it's Wesley, and you bite your tongue."

**S**o where does Kemp fit into this mix? Let's start with what he hasn't done.

There have been very few games in which Kemp has just dominated. He showed up in training camp weighing more than 270 pounds and hasn't lost as much weight as he'd like—he is listed officially at 6-10 and 256.

He leads the team (by far) in turnovers, a stunning statistic for a power forward. He has an annoying tendency to grab a rebound and then try to dribble downcourt through traffic, like a kid who has seen one too many clips of Magic Johnson.

For most of the season, Kemp has shot around 46 percent, a real drop from his career mark of 52 percent. He has hoisted a lot of optimistic jumpers.

"A lot of this isn't Shawn's fault," Fratello says. "He doesn't have Gary Payton or Hersey Hawkins on the court with him. Those guys knew exactly when and where to get him the ball. With our team, we're still learning about Shawn, and he's learning how to play for us."

But Kemp does bring a lot to the arena every night.

As Lakers coach Del Harris says, "When you begin putting your defense against the Cavs together, you start with how you will defend Kemp."

Kemp is good for 18 points and 10 rebounds most games. The attention he receives from the defense creates open jump shots, especially for Person.

Then there is the effort.

With the Cavs, Kemp has played hard.

Very hard.

He'll jump once ... twice ... three times for the same rebound—sometimes tapping the ball out to the corner and then running it down.

He'll defend the basket by blocking shots and delivering hard fouls.

He flare up and just rip the ball right out of the hands of an opponent.

He'll go to war against a player like Karl Malone. The Cavs never have had a player who could physically take on a power player of that stature.

Not only that, Kemp has the respect of the officials, who give him leeway in foul calls. He also has respect from this team, where he and Ferry are the captains.

"Every good young team has some policing in the locker room, and Shawn does a lot of that," Fratello says.

Kemp was disgruntled in Seattle with his contract and other slights.

With the Cavs, he has a new deal reported to be worth about \$100 million, clearly making him the highest-paid player on the team. Fratello consults him on policy. Kemp says he's "no longer a man-child," and the Cavs are taking him on his word.

"A lot of people figured I'd come to Cleveland and I'd lose," he says. "Those people don't know me. They don't know how much I want to win."

Kemp tries to stay away from rehashing his Seattle days. He doesn't want to respond to those who claim he behaved the way he did (showing up late for practices, etc.) to force a trade and secure a new contract.

"Did I do it for the money?" he asks. "Let's just say I'm happy."

So are the Cavs.

TSN

this week

# online



## Looking back at a legend

Twenty-five years after Roberto Clemente died in a plane crash attempting to deliver relief supplies to earthquake-stricken Nicaragua, TSN Archives looks back at his career with photo galleries, text from his most moving speech and Willie Stargell's perspective on Clemente's life. TSN also looks back at Clemente's career, baseball's reaction to his death and how the city of Pittsburgh hasn't forgotten him as a player or a person.



## Sounds of the hardwood

TSN and AudioNet bring you the sounds of the top 20 college basketball games each week on our website. This week's featured cybercasts: Kentucky-South Carolina, North Carolina-Maryland, Kansas-Texas, Syracuse-Louisville.



## Talk to the experts!

Big-time games, big-time chats. TSN's Buddy Ryan analyzes the conference championship games and previews the Super Bowl on January 14 at 8 p.m. TSN's Mike Keenan steps away from the Vancouver bench to answer your questions January 16 at 9 p.m. And college hoops expert Mike DeCourcy is still runnin' and gunnin' every Sunday night at 11. Plus, don't miss out on TSN's new weekday chats at 1 p.m. (All times Eastern.)

[www.sportingnews.com](http://www.sportingnews.com) — AOL keyword: TSN





**Dave D'Alessandro**

## In this wishing hour, Ewing returns, labor peace reigns

**A**nother year has marched in. It's called 1998, and aside from the usual assortment of prosperities and treacheries, we don't know much about it. OK, we can all safely assume that

somewhere along the way, Dennis Rodman will be found at 4 a.m. drinking beer and firing live rounds at lawn statues, but other than that, we're dealing with a blank slate.

So call this our top 10 wish list for the New Year. You'll notice that in no place below does the name of Latrell Sprewell appear, because it is our fervent hope he goes away until 1999.

1. Let's see the Sonics get back to the NBA Finals. This has nothing to do with our affection for true pros Vin Baker and Nate McMillan, which is considerable; we simply like the weather in Seattle in the late spring.

2. Shaquille O'Neal should stop punching the heavy bag and simply hire Mike Tyson as a sparring partner. Only then will he recognize boxing for the self-destructive idiocy that it is. Need an avocation? Try acting lessons.

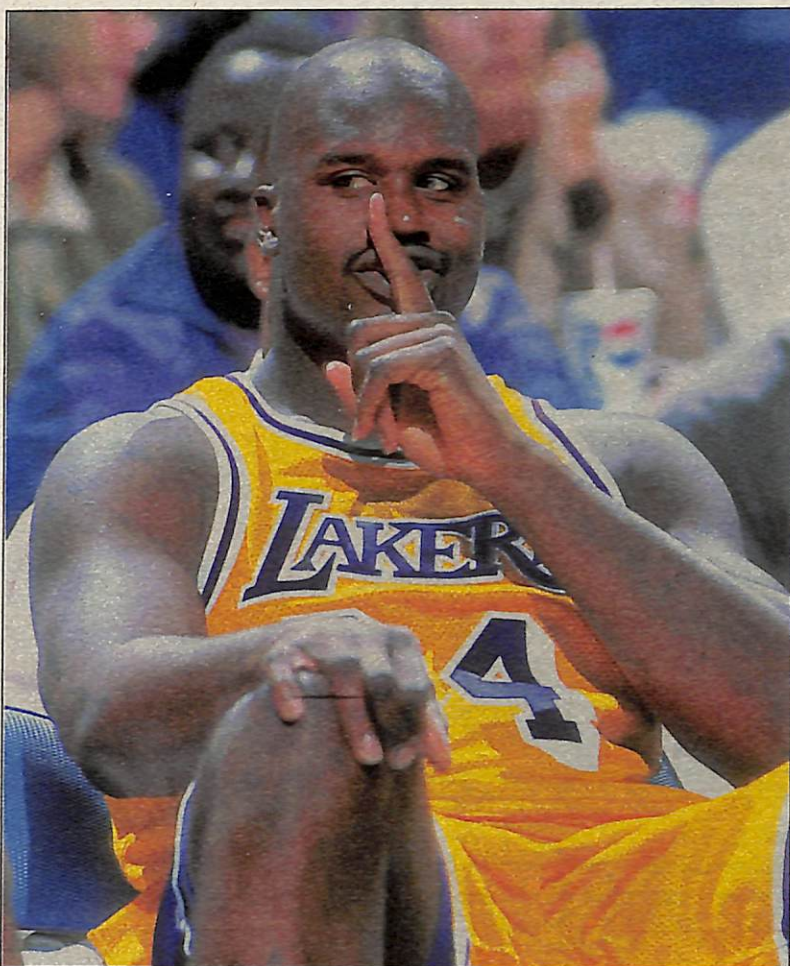
3. A new address for Damon Stoudamire would be nice—preferably in his hometown of Portland. If or when that happens, we would hope Darrell Walker upholds his New Year's Resolution ("Not to kill myself," he said) and remember that things could be worse. He could be working in Denver.

4. We'd like to see Anthony Mason zip it up and not screw up a pretty good gig. No matter how much he thinks he's being overlooked in the Hornets' offense now, he needs to remember only three things: The game slows down in postseason, all successful playoff offenses start in the post, and Dave Cowens knows both to be true.

5. Great second halves for Chuck Person, Sean Elliott and Vinny Del Negro, please. Any team with an inside game such as the one the Spurs have deserves some balance. And this way we don't have to run and hide when someone reminds us of our September prediction that the Spurs would be the best in the West.

6. Keep up that lenient officiating. Not only have they stopped calling forearms, they're even allowing the occasional hand-check these days, and the game hasn't suffered much. And while we're on the subject, cut Dee Kantner and Violet Palmer some slack—they're entitled to the same patience all rookies get.

7. We hope Ike Austin invests in a deluxe set of earplugs for all those times Pat Riley advises him



**HE'S NO TYSON: O'Neal would be better off taking acting lessons than continuing to work on the heavy bag. Boxing isn't in his future.**

that competing for a title while making \$3 million is preferable to moving elsewhere and making \$10 million a year for the rest of your career.

8. Let the Clippers get a clue. The gulf between the haves and have-nots in the West grows ever wider; it would be nice if a few of the dregs could aspire to mediocrity before the season is out, if only to make the race for eighth place interesting for a few weeks.

9. May Patrick Ewing be granted a medical miracle. His team wasn't that good with him anyway, but anyone who has as much belief in himself and his team is entitled to some comfort. He was openly ridiculed for his prediction that he can return this season despite his shattered wrist; most people facing adversity with such determination usually are praised.

10. One last time, wouldn't it be nice if commissioner David Stern could show all his genius for progressive leadership and intelligent compromise? Of course, he first has to actually start

working on the new labor agreement. He could start by scrapping the Labor Relations Committee, which is little more than a cynical smoke screen for his inactivity, and announcing on All-Star weekend that he and union boss Billy Hunter will enter the negotiations thinking like business partners and recognizing their commonality. Then—*mirabile dictu!*—get it done before we all hit the beach this summer.

## Family matters

Don Nelson, basketball rascal, received a surprise Christmas gift recently when he learned that he was the father of a 29-year-old woman. "It's really a neat story," says the Mavs coach, who was notified in a letter by his daughter, a Floridian named Lee McBride. "At first it knocked my socks off. But it's neat. Crazy, but neat."

Nellie explained that he spent a weekend with a woman in 1968, then lost contact with her, and that the child from that brief encounter was put up for adoption. Thankfully, it sounds as though this will have a nice ending—Nellie flew her out to Dallas right after getting her letter. No word on whether he'll be naming her a Dallas assistant coach for the 2000-01 season.

OK, cheap shot. Sure, there's an element of nepotism in Nellie's other big news last week, the one in which he named his son, Donn, as his coaching successor in 2000. But it's also a good hire.

The younger Nelson is one of the most astute minds in the business, a hard worker who has been around the game all his life, and players trust him. He is as resourceful as the old man, minus the ego, and the fringe benefit to all this is he'll be able to curse his general manager without fear of retribution.

## Hard knocks

If we didn't know any better, we'd say Darrell Walker is trying to get himself fired. He has been teeing off on 18-year-old Tracy McGrady a lot lately, when he'd probably be better off teaching the rookie a lesson by benching him and letting him figure out the errors of his ways. Instead, McGrady has been getting pummeled. "His work habits have to improve," Walker says. "He could be a very good basketball player or he could be out of the league in a couple of years. It's all up to him. His intensity level ... on a scale of one to 10, I'd say it's about a '2.' If he picked up his intensity level, he might be what we thought he could be when we drafted him. But maybe he's just too cool."

"He's 18, I understand that. But this is the NBA, you get paid to do a job and you better come ready to do it."

TSN

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## The book on Lorenzen Wright

Clippers, F/C 6-11 / 240

Although in only his second season, Wright's coming out party may have been last December 26 at the Great Western Forum in Los Angeles. He scored a career-high 32 points and added 15 rebounds in an overtime loss to the Lakers. That's quite an accomplishment considering Wright, 22, doesn't have natural on-court abilities.

However, hard work has made him one of the most improved players in the NBA this season. Entering this week, the former Memphis star is averaging 11.3 points and 9.0 rebounds per contest. Furthermore, he had 141 rebounds in his nine games (15.7 average) as he headed into Tuesday's game in Sacramento.

Wright's board work has been phenomenal in recent weeks because of his positioning in the paint, an aspect of his game that was almost nonexistent last season. Now, he scoops up loose balls or tips them out to a teammate.

Wright's biggest obstacle, however, has been his shooting touch around the basket. He often misses short jumpers and putbacks. In fact, Wright has missed as many as 11 shots in a game.



PETE NEWCOMB / FOR TSN

But against the Lakers last month, he was almost flawless. He created a big matchup problem for Robert Horry because of his size.

"I mentioned to our guys, 'Here's a (player) that's doing it with determination,'" Lakers coach Del Harris said. "He works really hard and has a soft touch around the basket."

The one thing Clippers coach Bill Fitch doesn't have to worry about is Wright's desire. If the latter is not practicing with the team, it's with his father, who despite being in a wheelchair, pushes Lorenzen to the limit during summer workouts.

If he continues to work hard, the future is limit-

less for Wright, who becomes a free agent after next season. He's already a quality rebounder and if he can score like he did against the Lakers, he can demand a huge contract.

"There's nobody on this team that works harder," says Fitch, who lacks a true big man, but gives Wright a lot of minutes at center. "The only player I've had that worked harder is Larry Bird. If Lorenzen keeps this up, he'll play on a lot of winners." —Gary Washburn

## TSN's Power Poll

Rk.	Team	W-L	Comment
1.	Seattle	25-6	Payton is making a bid for MVP.
2.	L.A. Lakers	24-7	Shaq is ready, willing and able to punish penetrators.
3.	Chicago	22-10	Michael and Dennis are taking on all challengers. And winning.
4.	Indiana	21-10	Getting sparkling play at the point from Jackson and Best.
5.	Miami	20-11	This season, road warriors they are not.
6.	San Antonio	20-11	How long can the front line cover for a lack of shooters?
7.	Utah	20-11	Seems like old times—"3" spot may be the team's downfall.
8.	Phoenix	19-9	With Robinson, the minutes are low, but the production is high.
9.	Portland	19-11	Rookie Williams is thriving off the bench.
10.	Charlotte	19-11	Hornets will be scary when Phills and Wesley start clicking.
11.	Atlanta	19-12	In the Central, it doesn't take much to go from first to fifth.
12.	Houston	16-12	It would be nice if someone joined Elie on defense.
13.	New Jersey	17-14	Nets' undersized front line is making opponents feel small.
14.	New York	18-13	Knicks want Johnson to be a leader; he's off to a good start.
15.	Boston	16-14	Teams are starting to grow nervous about Pervis.
16.	Minnesota	16-15	Carr continues to excite—and frustrate—the coaches.
17.	Cleveland	19-11	Kemp has been a constant force on the boards.
18.	Orlando	17-15	Team has proved it has some heart; now it needs scoring.
19.	Washington	16-17	Davis has been invaluable in the middle.
20.	Detroit	15-18	Pistons are really two teams: Collins, and everyone else.
21.	Milwaukee	14-17	Bucks need much more from Johnson and Lang in the middle.
22.	Sacramento	12-20	OK, everyone in favor of being traded, raise your hand.
23.	Vancouver	10-22	Edwards, Mack, Chilcutt leading the 3 parade.
24.	L.A. Clippers	8-24	Beginning to make a run—at the 30-win mark.
25.	Philadelphia	8-22	Ratliff gives Brown an athletic center, but not an offensive one.
26.	Golden State	7-22	Still looking for a reliable backcourt scorer.
27.	Toronto	4-28	With Camby and Williams down, frontcourt has been invisible.
28.	Dallas	5-27	Can Nellie really stand to watch this for two more seasons?
29.	Denver	2-28	In a rebuilding year, Nuggets are at ground zero.

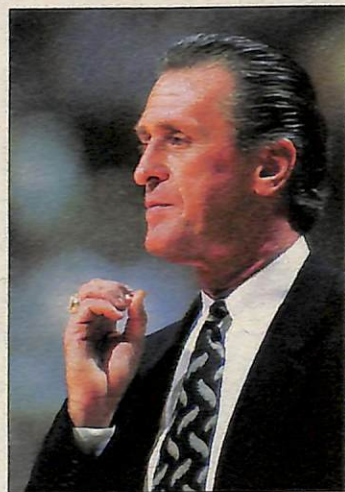
Records are through Saturday's games. The NBA Power Poll is determined by TSN editors and columnist Dave D'Alessandro.

## inside dish

FRONT OFFICE  
RUMBLINGS  
AND LOCKER  
ROOM  
WHISPERS

Let's not kid ourselves: We're headed for another Bulls-Heat series to decide the East, and Pat Riley knows it better than anyone. So he's already angling to gain control of the dialogue going into their next encounter—mostly by refusing to let go of the circumstances from the

Christmas Day loss at Chicago. He found the fact that Michael Jordan didn't have a single personal foul in 38 minutes particularly revealing: "His Majesty had no fouls in 38 minutes—38 minutes," Riley said. "So we have a lot of things to overcome. ... It's almost like world heavyweight champions: You can't win on points with them. You have to knock them out. They know that. The officials



ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

**RILED UP:** Riley believes the referees are showing favoritism toward Jordan.

know that. Everybody knows that. And the thing that bothers me is there's really a double standard. Our guys play hard, they play hard and when I take a look at the film, it's a joke. It's an absolute joke." ... It looks like nobody wants to play for Doug Collins anymore. Brian Williams started another brush fire by twice snapping at his coach during a timeout against Toronto after Collins instructed him to stop concentrating on personal stats. "I don't know where that came from," Williams said. "Do I look like I'm playing for numbers out there? (Doug's) got something to say on every single play, and he's going to tell me that I'm playing for numbers? (Bleep) that." They kissed and made up, but this routine is getting too much for all of them to coexist much longer. ... Dean Garrett describes how he finds Denver different from Minnesota: "There's a lot of selfishness in this room," he says. "There (are) a lot of times when there could be another pass made, to help the team out and to play better, but it's not happening. When I was in Minnesota, nobody had to worry about that." Garrett's most unselfish teammate last year was Stephon Marbury. "He just did whatever he could to make everybody better," Garrett says. ... Kings guard Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf is miffed over his lack of playing time. "They didn't trade for me to be a passer; at least that's what I was told," he says. "But at this point, I don't know what they got me for." Coach Eddie Jordan made clear what it would take for Mahmoud to get back into the rotation. "Making shots would help," he said. "Defending would help. And playing a good floor game would help."



## The brightest side

For the Bulls, several positives have come out of the Scottie Pippen injury/protest. To compensate for his absence, Toni Kukoc has been given a chance to show all of his offensive skills, Luc Longley has shown he can be more than merely a passer and backup guard Randy Brown has been looking to penetrate more than ever.

But the biggest upside is the emergence of Dennis Rodman as a—brace yourselves, folks—leader. Michael Jordan says he has been the team's MVP. Kukoc says Rodman has made a conscious effort to set an example.

"He's the oldest guy (36) on the team," Kukoc says, "and you really expect the oldest child in the family to step up when things are not going good. ... He knows how to control himself when he needs to. Right now, he has totally given himself to the team."

## Courtside chatter

### WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A NEW COACH ABOUT HANDLING TODAY'S YOUNG PLAYERS?



#### Del Harris, Lakers:

"Prepare yourself for your job so that players can have confidence in what you can give to them. Then try to develop a mutual trust and respect by giving trust and respect. Let them

know on a consistent basis you care about them as a person and a player."



#### Lenny Wilkens, Hawks:

"It starts with respect. You have to give some in order to get it back is the way I approach it. We're all men, and you have to treat your players like that. I think

that's why I never have any problems. ..."



#### Bill Fitch, Clippers:

"Take all of your jokers out of the deck before you start ... there's no difference between the players then and now. ... The basket is still the same, the ball is still the same and the

floor is still the same."



**IN CONTROL:** Van Exel is giving the Lakers a steady diet of mistake-free offense and is making a strong bid to make his first All-Star Game appearance.

## His level best

He isn't the most dominating player on the Lakers. Or the most exciting. Or the most versatile. In those areas, Nick Van Exel doesn't stack up to Shaquille O'Neal, Kobe Bryant and Eddie Jones.

He is, however, the most consistent.

In previous years, stable wasn't a word that could be used to describe Van Exel. He has become notorious for fireworks on the court that go well beyond the scoresheet—his past includes a shoving incident involving official Ron Garretson and a run-in with coach Del Harris.

But this season, no Laker has been steadier—or more reliable. He led the team to the league's second-best record while O'Neal recovered from abdominal and hand injuries, and he is making a strong case to make his first All-Star appearance.

Van Exel, who is averaging 16 points per game, leads the league in assist-to-turnover ratio (4.7-to-1). He also has become more selective with his 3-point attempts (he is hitting 41 percent). On defense, he is picking up opposing point guards sooner, forcing teams to take more time to start their offense, and has shown improvement defending the pick-and-roll.

"Nick has really accepted the defensive challenge this year, from the beginning," Harris says.

In the offseason, Van Exel showed a willingness to change—Lakers chief Jerry West persuaded him to seek counseling for his problems with authority—and he has followed through on a commitment to play with a new attitude.

The cockiness and showmanship remain—his shadowboxing routine has become a trademark—but the sulking, the outbursts and the wild swings in performance are gone. He has taken instruc-

tions from Harris enthusiastically and has helped keep the team composed during rough stretches. Coming into this week, he had yet to be called for a technical.

"(The team's attitude is) night and day compared to last year," assistant coach Larry Drew says. "It has started with Nick."

## Blazing

Trail Blazers coach Mike Dunleavy says Rasheed Wallace, who has spent time at all three frontcourt positions, deserves to be considered for the league's All-Defensive Team. Wallace, 6-10, entered the week averaging a steal and 1.6 blocks per game. He still has trouble when he is asked to guard some of the smaller forwards in the league, but he has been able to compensate with his wingspan and work ethic.

"I see his versatility, his ability to guard opponents out on the floor or in the post," Dunleavy says. "Really, he's guarded people from Kendall Gill and Rex Chapman to Tim Duncan and hasn't been lit up by anybody."

What has impressed Dunleavy even more is the professionalism Wallace has showed. Wallace recently was reunited with his 2-year-old son, Ishmiel, who had been missing with his mother for several months. (She was held in contempt of court for failing to turn Ishmiel over to Wallace.)

He enlisted the help of friends, family and even private detectives in his search, but he never let it affect his approach to games and practices. "Whatever he was going through, he never let it creep into his work," Dunleavy says. "I never saw it, never heard it. He didn't ask for help from us, didn't ask for time off. I would have given it to him, but it never came up."

## Off the rim

### ■ THE 'ZO EFFECT:

Miami has yet to see Alonzo Mourning's impact in the win-loss column—last week the Heat were 5-4 with him in the lineup. But the team's defense has improved significantly. Without Mourning, opponents averaged 94.9 points and shot 45.7 percent. Since his return, those numbers have shrunk to 86.6 and 40.7. "Everybody knows he's there," Coach Pat Riley says.

### ■ LOW POINT:

The Blazers' Kenny Anderson hasn't adjusted well to his role under new coach Mike Dunleavy. "Last year, I was like the total offense, or at least I was the first option," he says. "Now I have to be maybe the third option." Isaiah Rider and Arvydas Sabonis have been the focal points. Anderson, who is shooting 38 percent, is being asked to distribute the ball, but his 4.8 assists average ranks near the bottom of the league among starting point guards.

### ■ SHOOT FIRST, ASK

LATER: Calbert Cheaney has renewed his efforts to be more assertive on offense, and the Wizards are suddenly looking like the playoff contender they were expected to be. Washington had won eight of 11 entering the week.

### ■ DIFFERENT TUNE:

Talk about diversifying your assets. Nuggets center Priest Lauderdale has bought two apartment buildings and put money into a funeral home and a radio station. An odd mix, to be sure. But he has good reasons for each investment. "Everybody needs a place to live, everybody dies, and I just like music," he says.



## THREE'S COMPANY

One would think the Bulls have the best scoring trio in the NBA this season. After all, Air Jordan is still king, and Toni Kukoc and Luc Longley have scored their fair share of points. But as the chart reveals, the young Bucks have the best threesome leading into this week's games.

Graphic by Mike Nyerges / TSN

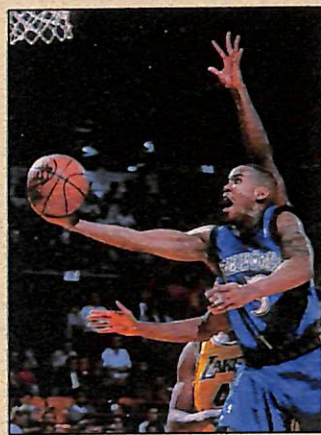
Trio	Team	Comb. ppg
G. Robinson-R. Allen-T. Brandon	Bucks	57.7
C. Webber-J. Howard-R. Strickland	Wizards	56.0
T. Gugliotta-S. Marbury-K. Garnett	Timberwolves	55.8
G. Hill-B. Williams-J. Stackhouse*	Pistons	55.6
M. Jordan-T. Kukoc-L. Longley	Bulls	55.3
V. Baker-G. Payton-D. Schrempf	SuperSonics	55.1
C. Drexler-K. Willis-C. Barkley	Rockets	53.9
E. Jones-K. Bryant-N. Van Exel	Lakers	51.3
D. Robinson-T. Duncan-S. Elliott	Spurs	50.7
M. Richmond-C. Williamson-L. Funderburke	Kings	50.3

\*Includes Stackhouse's average with the 76ers.

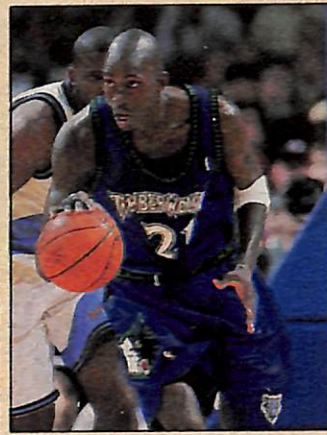
Statistics provided by STATS, Inc.



Gugliotta



Marbury



Garnett

## SCORING AVERAGE

NAME	G	FG	FT	PTS	AVG
JORDAN, Chi	31	323	228	883	28.5
MALONE, Uta	30	285	190	760	25.3
ROBINSON, SA	30	242	216	700	23.3
RICHMOND, Sac	32	249	186	736	23.0
RICE, Cha	30	243	158	688	22.9
ABDUR-RAHIM, Van	32	260	206	730	22.8
ROBINSON, Mil	30	277	104	673	22.4
WALKER, Bos	29	247	105	633	21.8
WEBBER, Was	30	268	70	630	21.0
EWING, NY	26	203	134	540	20.8
GUGLIOTTA, Min	29	224	137	586	20.2
MILLER, Ind	30	190	175	604	20.1
HILL, Det	31	215	182	614	19.8
BAKER, Sea	31	250	111	611	19.7
FINLEY, Dal	31	229	113	610	19.7
CASSELL, NJ	30	196	186	589	19.6
IVERSON, Phi	28	201	118	546	19.5
HOWARD, Was	31	226	149	601	19.4
HARDAWAY, Mia	30	217	88	580	19.3
SMITH, Atl	27	179	122	517	19.1
PAYTON, Sea	31	214	131	592	19.1
B. WILLIAMS, Det	32	262	82	606	18.9
WILLIS, Hou	27	207	91	505	18.7
DREXLER, Hou	27	170	128	502	18.6
MARBURY, Min	30	190	145	557	18.6
STOUDAMIRE, Tor	31	211	107	564	18.2
ALLEN, Mil	30	192	114	543	18.1
JONES, LAL	31	200	94	554	17.9
KEMP, Cle	28	188	120	498	17.8
GARNETT, Min	30	216	91	525	17.5
SMITS, Ind	30	225	75	525	17.5

## FIELD-GOAL PERCENTAGE

NAME	FG AT FG%
DUNCAN, SA	213 374 .570
WILLIS, Hou	207 378 .548
BAKER, Sea	250 467 .535
MANNING, Pho	157 294 .534
ROBINSON, SA	242 457 .530
MCDYESS, Pho	153 290 .528
MUTOMBO, Atl	165 313 .527
MALONE, Uta	285 544 .524
ELLIS, Sea	149 285 .523
SMITS, Ind	225 437 .515
DIVAC, Cha	143 278 .514
B.W. LAMMS, Det	262 512 .512
GRANT, Por	126 247 .510

## THREE-POINT PERCENTAGE

NAME	3FG AT 3G%
HORNACEK, Uta	27 55 .491
ELLIS, Sea	57 117 .487
RESPECT, Tor	19 41 .463
DAVIS, Dal	37 80 .463
WARD, NY	29 63 .460
MILLER, Ind	49 107 .458
B. EDWARDS, Van	20 44 .455
RICE, Cha	44 97 .454
MARTIN, LAC	51 113 .451
MACK, Van	39 89 .438
THOMAS, Phi	18 43 .419
KERR, Chi	25 60 .417
JACKSON, SA	34 82 .415

## FREE-THROW PERCENTAGE

NAME	FT AT FT%
MULLIN, Ind	59 62 .952
PRICE, Ori	52 57 .912
ALLEN, Mil	114 126 .905
MILLER, Ind	175 195 .897
HORNACEK, Uta	119 133 .895
ANDERSON, Cle	135 152 .888
LAETTNER, Atl	142 160 .888
RICHMOND, Sac	186 210 .886
SMITH, Atl	122 138 .884
HAWKINS, Sea	71 82 .866
JOHNSON, Pho	64 74 .865
STITH, Den	44 51 .863
BARRY, LAC	69 80 .863
RICE, Cha	158 184 .859
MURRAY, Was	65 76 .855
SCOTT, Dal	64 75 .853
MITCHELL, Min	75 88 .852
HOUSTON, NY	80 94 .851
SCHREMPF, Sea	131 155 .845
GRAY, Atl	54 64 .844
EISLEY, Uta	59 70 .843
CASSELL, NJ	186 221 .842

## REBOUNDING AVERAGE

NAME	O-D AVG
RODMAN, Chi	166-314 15.5
BARKLEY, Hou	113-217 13.8
J. WILLIAMS, NJ	213-198 13.7
DUNCAN, SA	82-266 11.6
ROBINSON, SA	110-233 11.4
MUTOMBO, Atl	105-232 11.2
HILL, Mil	102-180 10.8
B. WILLIAMS, Det	106-230 10.5
MALONE, Uta	86-228 10.5
WALKER, Bos	91-211 10.4
EWING, NY	59-206 10.2
SABONIS, Por	54-225 10.0
MARSHALL, GS	92-173 9.8
MASON, Cha	68-224 9.7
GARRETT, Den	109-172 9.7
GRANT, Por	97-150 9.5
KEMP, Cle	69-192 9.3
GARNETT, Min	70-205 9.2
WILLIS, Hou	85-162 9.1
WEBBER, Was	75-198 9.1

## ASSISTS

NAME	G A AVG
STRICKLAND, Was	33 352 10.7
PAYTON, Sea	31 292 9.4
HARDAWAY, Mia	30 274 9.1
KIDD, Pho	28 255 9.1
MARBURY, Min	30 260 8.7
JACKSON, Ind	30 258 8.6
JOHNSON, SA	30 252 8.4
STOUDAMIRE, Tor	31 259 8.4
CASSELL, NJ	30 246 8.2
KNIGHT, Cle	27 215 8.0
VAN EXEL, LAL	31 238 7.7
BRANDON, Mil	23 170 7.4
HILL, Det	31 226 7.3
WESLEY, Cha	29 199 6.9

## STEALS

NAME	G S AVG
KNIGHT, Cle	27 78 2.9
KIDD, Pho	28 72 2.6
PAYTON, Sea	31 76 2.5
IVERSON, Phi	28 68 2.4
BRANDON, Mil	23 53 2.3
CHRISTIE, Tor	28 63 2.3
JONES, LAL	31 68 2.2
HARDAWAY, Mia	30 64 2.1
WALKER, Bos	29 61 2.1
HAWKINS, Sea	31 64 2.1
PERSON, Cle	29 58 2.0
GILL, NJ	30 59 2.0
BLAYLOCK, Atl	28 53 1.9
HUNTER, Det	30 56 1.9
CASSELL, NJ	30 56 1.9

## BLOCKED SHOTS

NAME	G BL AVG
BRADLEY, Dal	17 63 3.7
MUTOMBO, Atl	30 109 3.6
CAMBY, Tor	22 69 3.1
DUNCAN, SA	30 79 2.6
STEWART, Sac	32 82 2.6
ROBINSON, SA	30 76 2.5
RATLIFF, Phi	32 74 2.3
EWING, NY	26 58 2.2
GARNETT, Min	30 60 2.0
JOHNSON, Mil	29 55 1.9
MCCILVAINE, Sea	28 53 1.9
OSTERTAG, Uta	28 53 1.9

## TEAM OFFENSE

TEAM	G	FGM-FGA	PCT	3M-3A	PCT	FTM-FTA	PCT	AVG
LA LAKERS	31	1202-2509	.479	204-581	.351	667-960	.695	105.6
HOUSTON	27	989-2194	.451	200-588	.340	590-757	.779	102.5
SEATTLE	31	1157-2456	.471	206-533	.386	616-832	.740	101.2
PHOENIX	28	1076-2322	.463	138-416	.332	530-723	.733	100.7
MINNESOTA	30	1132-2457	.461	86-282	.305	643-852	.755	99.8
NEW JERSEY	30	1079-2511	.430	102-313	.326	687-961	.715	98.2
CHARLOTTE	30	1087-2307	.471	128-330	.388	613-826	.742	97.2
UTAH	30	1058-2266	.467	77-236	.326	720-968	.744	97.1
WASHINGTON	33	1239-2758	.449	125-343	.364	592-855	.692	96.8
MIAMI	30	1075-2352	.457	204-558	.366	535-738	.725	96.3
INDIANA	30	1059-2226	.476	109-298	.366	648-843	.769	95.8
BOSTON	29	1046-2449	.427	156-477	.327	519-740	.701	95.4
LA CLIPPERS	31	1102-2523	.437	195-535	.364	545-767	.711	95.0
PORTLAND	29	1008-2263	.443	136-384	.350	500-820	.722	94.7
CHICAGO	31	1117-2561	.436	83-282	.294	596-834	.715	94.0
MILWAUKEE	30	1075-2304	.467	81-232	.349	588-776	.758	94.0
VANCOUVER	32	1142-2519	.453	114-310	.368	607-852	.712	93.9
SAN ANTONIO	30	1065-2250	.473	115-328	.351	571-841	.679	93.9
ATLANTA	30	1045-2329	.449	107-345	.310	604-783	.771	93.4
SACRAMENTO	32	1157-2620	.442	99-291	.340	559-824	.678	92.9
NEW YORK	30	1050-2340	.449	121-386	.313	540-729	.741	92.0
TORONTO	31	1102-2540	.434	114-335	.340	535-741	.722	92.0
PHILADELPHIA	30	1015-2316	.438	86-287	.300	639-887	.720	91.8
CLEVELAND	29	981-2187	.449	95-296	.321	587-784	.749	91.2
DETROIT	32	1074-2482	.433	84-296	.284	678-913	.743	90.9
DENVER	29	949-2300	.413	84-282	.298	648-867	.747	90.7
ORLANDO	31	1058-2453	.431	103-315	.327	590-794	.743	90.6
DALLAS	31	1048-2503	.419	178-477	.373	482-641	.752	88.9
GOLDEN STATE	29	1027-2488	.413	63-239	.264	436-642	.679	88.0

## TEAM DEFENSE

TEAM	G	FGM-FGA	PCT	3M-3A	PCT	FTM-FTA	PCT	AVG
NEW YORK	30	915-2247	.407	111-367	.302	660-863	.765	86.7
CLEVELAND	29	933-2184	.427	113-336	.336	555-756	.734	87.4
CHICAGO	31	1034-2508	.412	104-355	.293	552-761	.725	87.9
INDIANA	30	1023-2400	.426	93-298	.312	535-761	.703	89.1
DETROIT	32	1057-2463	.429	140-431	.325	604-831	.727	89.3
SAN ANTONIO	30	1028-2447	.420	134-376	.356	549-764	.719	91.3
ATLANTA	30	1086-2446	.444	101-346	.292	470-648	.725	91.4
PORTLAND	29	966-2291	.422	119-362	.329	602-859	.701	91.5
SEATTLE	31	1093-2464	.444	143-425	.336	543-766	.709	92.6
MIAMI	30	1021-2324	.439	100-319	.313	641-876	.732	92.8
UTAH	30	980-2308	.425	129-370	.349	713-925	.771	93.4
ORLANDO	31	1148-2469	.465	112-317	.353	491-673	.730	93.5
MILWAUKEE	30	1032-2270	.455	92-281	.327	664-914	.726	94.0
CHARLOTTE	30	1079-2304	.468	131-368	.356	556-762	.730	94.8
WASHINGTON	33	1190-2650	.449	136-363	.375	645-867	.744	95.8
NEW JERSEY	30	1172-2328	.460	120-369	.325	637-827	.770	96.7
PHOENIX	28	1031-2287	.451	126-354	.356	522-702	.744	96.8
PHILADELPHIA	30	1094-2377	.460	137-393	.349	587-823	.713	97.1
BOSTON	29	1008-2144	.470	99-310	.319	702-961	.730	97.1
SACRAMENTO	32	1181-2580	.458	119-348	.342	629-841	.748	97.2
LA LAKERS	31	1139-2568	.444	138-424	.325	598-833	.718	97.2
DALLAS	31	1197-2576	.465	132-382	.346	499-704	.709	97.6
GOLDEN STATE	29	1040-2397	.434	135-360	.375	628-886	.709	98.0
HOUSTON	27	1036-2236	.463	141-404	.349	468-646	.724	99.3
MINNESOTA	30	1113-2511	.443	139-441	.315	616-844	.730	99.4
TORONTO	31	1193-2478	.481	142-378	.376	595-865	.688	100.7
VANCOUVER	32	1247-2634	.473	146-393	.372	603-821	.734	101.3
DENVER	29	1091-2311	.472	140-368	.380	631-851	.741	101.8
LA CLIPPERS	31	1187-2583	.460	115-337	.341	669-930	.719	101.9



## Bucks

### The return of Brandon gives Robinson a boost



Terrell Brandon's return to the lineup December 30 had an immediate impact, as he led the team to a win over Dallas and helped it stay with the Bulls in Chicago for three quarters. The point guard, who missed seven games with a sprained left ankle, scored 18 points and had 14 assists in his first game back. ...

Glenn Robinson was the greatest beneficiary of Brandon's return. Robinson scored 32 points against Dallas and a season-high 42 against Chicago. Many of the points came off assists from Brandon. ... With Brandon's return, Ray Allen was able to return to full-time duty at shooting guard. Allen had only one turnover against Dallas. He was having problems with turnovers while filling in for Brandon at point guard. ... Coach Chris Ford says Brandon probably should have had at least 20 assists against the Mavericks. He had several good passes fumbled by center Ervin Johnson and other big men up front. Johnson and Andrew Lang have struggled with consistency at center. Johnson had only one point and no rebounds while fouling out against Chicago. —Gregg Hoffmann



## Bulls

### Jordan is heating up as others contribute



The team is looking more like its old self, and so is Michael Jordan. After struggling to find his shot early on, Jordan is back in rhythm and again scoring points like no other player in the game. Jordan scored 44 points on

15-for-22 shooting in a win over the Bucks last Friday—the third time in a four-game span he topped 40 points. "I feel like I'm in great shape and starting to get myself into a good playing rhythm," says Jordan, who averaged 41.3 points on 57 percent shooting in the four-game span. The key to the turnaround has been the development of other players. ... The one game when Jordan didn't top 40 points came against the Timberwolves, when he was somewhat distracted in the second half. At halftime, Jordan received what was later determined to be a bogus note saying his mother, Deloris, had been hospitalized in North Carolina. ... Dennis Rodman and Luc Longley continue to provide one of the better power forward/center combinations in the NBA. Rodman is pulling down 20 rebounds nearly every game, and Longley already has scored his career high twice this season. —John Jackson



## Cavaliers

### Rookie quartet playing a role in team's fortunes



The team has gone the entire season with four rookies playing prominent roles.

Three of the rookies were among league leaders in several categories through last week. Center Zydrunas Ilgauskas was 15th in blocked shots (1.71) and 29th in rebounding (8.2). Guard Derek Anderson was fourth in free-throw percentage (.900), and guard Brevin Knight was first in steals (2.96) and ninth in assists (8.1). Forward Cedric Henderson would be ranked fourth in the league in field-goal percentage (.534), but he doesn't have enough attempts. ... The team has to find a consistent outside shooter. Wesley Person was the man hired for the job, but he has to become more consistent and not disappear for weeks at a time. Either he comes into his own, or the team is not going to make the playoffs. ... Just call Tony Dumas the team's new defensive stopper. The team placed shooting guard Mitchell Butler (neck surgery) on the injured list last Friday and activated Dumas. ... Mike Fratello gave Danny Ferry a spot start last Friday against the Magic, and Ferry responded with 13 points and nine rebounds. The team needs that kind of play from Ferry. —Bob Finman



## Celtics

### No rest in Midwest for weary troops



The team already has exceeded its win total from last year's defenseless, indefensible lot. ... Coach Rick Pitino kept the team in the Midwest when there were a couple of days between games at Milwaukee and Chicago last week. The biggest reason in Pitino's mind: it gives the young team another day of practice. ... Center Travis Knight returned from injury, but Andrew DeClercq still gets the starting nod.

His minutes vary wildly, which is true of almost every player except Antoine Walker. ... Dana Barros has been inconsistent off the bench. He needs minutes to get in a groove and when he is in a groove, he is as good a pure shooter as there is. ... Pitino put Greg Minor on the injured list with the flu before bringing back Pervis Ellison. That situation bears watching. Minor objected to the players association the last time he was put on the injured list; he said he wasn't hurt, a complaint greatly unappreciated by Pitino. ... Ellison returned against Minnesota last Friday. He had eight points, nine rebounds and two blocks in 22 minutes. ... Before getting the flu, Dee Brown was averaging more than 20 minutes per game. Since coming off the injured list, he hardly has played at all—and isn't happy about it. —Peter May



## Hawks

### Christmas break doesn't help slump



Even with a weeklong recess before New Year's, the team couldn't find the answers to help regain all of the early-season momentum. Despite a call for greater intensity, toughness and to run the fast break more, the team continued half-stepping on the West Coast in the midst of a losing streak. ... The team

isn't getting coach Lenny Wilkens' message these days and frustration has begun to set in. The Hawks lost seven straight as they headed into Wednesday's game against Golden State and the story remains the same: Either they win the rebounding battle or they lose the game. ... The team has not been able to rely on Mookie Blaylock for two weeks, and it has fallen apart. The transition defense has been consistently tardy and has given up points in bunches. ... Blaylock returned to the lineup last Friday against the Lakers—also Shaquille O'Neal's first game back after missing 20 games—but Blaylock aggravated his groin injury five minutes into the first quarter and did not return. ... Christian Laettner was one of the few bright spots in the Lakers' game, scoring 22 points while hitting 7-for-17 from the field. But Tyrone Corbin was a defensive liability and non-factor offensively. —Mark F. Gray



## Heat

### Riley wants the team to remain road warriors



Dominant on the road last season, coach Pat Riley is stressing repeat dominance as his team deals with a road-intensive January. Last season, the team was 16-2 on the road through the first two months and a league-best 32-9 for the season.

This season, the road record through the turn of the year was 8-6. Riley says the difference has been fewer "automatic" victories, with upgraded play throughout the Eastern Conference. ... With his free agency arriving July 1, but the trading deadline preceding that by 4½ months, center Isaac Austin remains on edge about a potential trade. Because the team will be over the salary cap this offseason, and because Austin has only two years' tenure, Austin can receive no more than a base contract of about \$2.5 million. But the concern now for the team is how Austin is adjusting to life as a reserve. Off the bench, he has not come close to his production when he was starting for Alonzo Mourning, who was injured. ... Brought in to convert the long ball, Terry Mills too often has been trapped into awkward shots while trying to drive. As a result, his minutes have been dwindling. —Ira Winderman



## Hornets

### Team enjoys best game, but will trend continue?



For one night last week, the team looked like a world beater in what coach Dave Cowens and several players were calling their finest effort of the season—a 120-101 victory at

Houston. The team shattered season highs in almost every offensive statistical category, shooting 60 percent from the field (48-for-80) and hitting 12 3-pointers, on 12-of-18 shooting. David Wesley, who led all scorers with 32 points, scored a team-record 21 in the first quarter. ... Glen Rice scored 42 points in last week's win over Miami, the eighth time in his three seasons with the team he has surpassed 40 points in a game. ... Cowens continues to play hunches, and they continue to pay off. He went with B.J. Armstrong in the win over Miami and benched Wesley for key stretches during that game. The players continue to moan about the lack of a more formalized rotation, but that doesn't seem to be of great concern to Cowens. He still is doing it his way. ... The backcourt remains enigmatic. Bobby Phills has been up and down all season. And after his 32-point output, Wesley took six shots in his next game and was benched. —John DeLong



## Knicks

### Despite doctors' denials, Ewing expects to return



Either Patrick Ewing is a strong believer in the power of positive thinking or he is suffering from a massive case of denial. Despite the fact doctors and the team have stated there is little chance of Ewing

being back for the playoffs, he held a news conference to announce just that. Ewing: "I have a goal to make it back before the playoffs at the end of the season." ... When told of Ewing's remarks, coach Jeff Van Gundy didn't seem so convinced. Ewing, who dislocated a bone in his wrist, had been wearing a bulky soft cast but had it replaced with a more mobile hard one last week. He won't be able to begin his rehab before early March. ... One disturbing observation to come out of last Friday's loss at New Jersey is it was the Nets, not the Knicks, who looked like the blue-collar, banging team. In fact, the Knicks slowly are becoming a team of 3-point shooters, with Larry Johnson being the sole consistent inside threat. ... In a one-week period, Chris Dudley got the flu, had an MRI taken to find what is ailing his back and had his nose broken by the elbow of the Magic's Derek Harper. —Barbara Barker





## Magic

### Starting backups show wear and tear



The team has had only three nights all season in which it shot better than 50 percent. Those came against Boston, Denver and Philadelphia, none of which is considered a tough defensive team. ... The team has players capable of contributing in spurts, but few who can sustain their offense for entire games—let alone weeks or months at a time. ... The latest stretch of games against opponents with winning records has exposed the shortcomings of players who were meant to play backup roles—**Horace Grant**, **Derek Harper**, **Mark Price**, **Bo Outlaw**—but are being forced to play starters' minutes. Grant and Outlaw have been playing too much recently, and it is starting to show. Through last Saturday's loss to the Knicks, Grant had played at least 41 minutes in six of eight games, and Outlaw, who figured to get 20 minutes a game, had played at least 32 minutes in 12-of-15. The injuries to **Penny Hardaway**, **Nick Anderson** and **Derek Strong** loom larger and larger as the season rolls along. ... **Brian Evans** has been a spark, but the bench zip is gone. You know it's bad when coach **Chuck Daly** praises **Gerald Wilkins** after Wilkins goes 3-for-9 and scores eight points, as he did last Friday. —*Bill Fay*



## Pacers

### Bird must improvise after injuries hit lineup



The Pacers won 11 games in December—the best month in franchise history—despite playing nine of 15 games on the road. It plays eight of 14 at home in January. ... The team had been the only one this season to start every game with the same lineup, but it had to improvise against Washington last Friday. **Dale Davis** sprained his ankle in a win over New Jersey, so **Derrick McKey**—the starting small forward the last four seasons—got the call at power forward. McKey, playing his fifth game after returning from injury, responded with nine points, four rebounds, three steals and some crucial defense. ... First-rounder **Austin Croshere** scored his first points last Friday. He had missed all 10 of his field-goal attempts and failed to score in 29 minutes over five previous games, but he had four points and seven rebounds in 16 minutes against the Wizards. Injuries to Davis and **Antonio Davis** enabled him to get his first first-half minutes. ... **Rik Smits**' presence has taken pressure off the perimeter game. He is averaging 17.4 points on 52 percent shooting, and has been much more active defensively. —*Mark Montieth*



## Raptors

### Beleaguered Stoudamire finally blows his cool



After the team was handled by the Wizards 118-91 New Year's Eve, **Damon Stoudamire** finally let go, making it clear he can't see any point in remaining a Raptor long term under the current conditions. Stoudamire has the team in a tough place: The February 19 trade deadline looms closer, and he becomes a free agent at the end of the season. Stoudamire also hinted the relationship between himself and new general manager **Glen Grunwald** hardly was ideal. ... Teen-aged rookie **Tracy McGrady**, who made his first NBA start against the Wizards, demanded and received a meeting with Grunwald and coach **Darrell Walker** last Friday, in the wake of strong comments by Walker that McGrady's work ethic needed significant improvement. ... This says it all: 5-10 guard Stoudamire and backcourt partner **Doug Christie** outrebounded the team's starting forwards and center in last Friday's 91-88 loss to the Pistons. It's true that forwards **Walt Williams** and **Marcus Camby** are out with injury, but the frontcourt isn't scoring, isn't rebounding and basically isn't getting the job done. —*Craig Daniels*

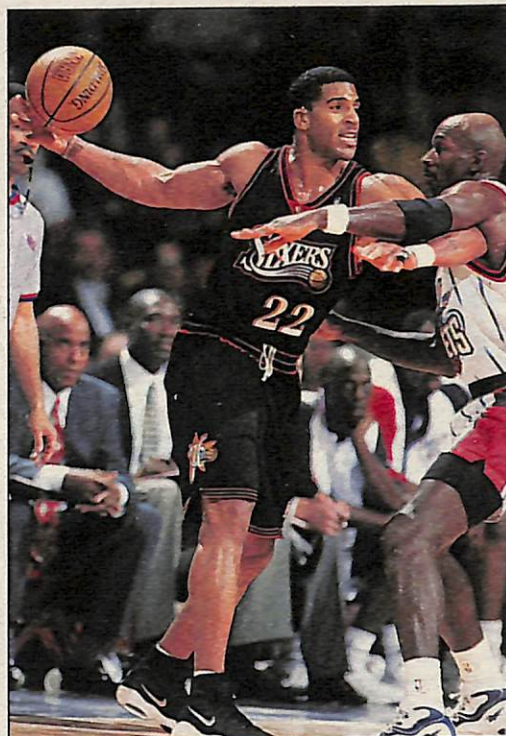


## Nets

### Size isn't everything for Calipari



The team's starting lineup appears to have some major size problems on the front line. Coach **John Calipari**, however, sees it differently. The coach doesn't flinch about having a 6-10 center in **Jayson Williams**, a lanky 230-pound power forward in **Keith Van Horn**, and 6-5 **Kendall Gill** at small forward. Calipari is convinced Williams—a free agent at the end of the season—is a legitimate NBA center and Gill's best position is small forward. Van Horn also has stepped up his rebounding to the point where the team is not getting beaten too often on the boards. ... Van Horn's confidence level is incredible, as are some of the moves to the hoop he made against the Knicks last Friday. It's beginning to look as if he can average 25 points and seven rebounds. ... Gill has been having foul problems, which almost never happened last season. ... The team is giddy about **Sherman Douglas**, who was signed for the NBA minimum on the eve of the season after being cut by Denver. Douglas is averaging nine points and four assists in 20 minutes. ... Guard **Lucious Harris** practiced with the team New Year's night for the first time since breaking his hand November 1. He is expected back this week. —*John Brennan*



TWO-STEP: Jackson is settling in at off guard.

ROBERT SEALE / TSN

## 76ers

### Will Iverson find a niche in Brown's system?



After struggling through one of the worst months of his career, **Allen Iverson** got off to a good start to begin the new year. Iverson briefly broke out of a shooting and scoring slump New Year's Day when he shot 11-for-20 from the field. His 29 points keyed a 115-104 victory over the Grizzlies. Iverson also had 11 assists, four steals and only two turnovers. It remains to be seen, though, if Iverson finally can find a way to fit into coach **Larry Brown**'s system, which calls for finding the open man and making the extra pass to create easier baskets. ... **Clarence Weatherspoon** continues to work hard, even though it is likely the team will trade him before the February 19 deadline. He still is a good multipurpose forward who can score and rebound, and he won't complain if he loses some minutes with a winning team. ... The team has a more athletic player in center **Theo Ratliff** than with now-traded **Eric Montross**, but Brown would like to see more points from Ratliff. ... After playing much of the season at small forward, **Jim Jackson** seems to be settling in at the shooting guard position. —*Don Benevento*



## Pistons

### Collins OKs Hill's plan to gear up his offense



If the team were winning, **Grant Hill**'s declaration that he needs to score more might be a sign of selfishness. But it is still under .500, so his newfound assertiveness has been welcome. "My mentality has been to take six or seven minutes to get everybody else involved, but I don't think I can take that approach this year," Hill says. "With this team, I can't be a playmaker. I have to be a scorer." Coach **Doug Collins** endorses Hill's revelation. "He's working for a coach who never saw a shot he didn't like," Collins says. ... In the absence of point guard **Lindsey Hunter** (pulled calf), **Joe Dumars** has definitely done the job. He scored a season-high 24 points in a victory over the Raptors December 30, then added 23 points in the rematch in Toronto three nights later. ... **Jerry Stackhouse** appears to be fitting in better as a starter. He took over Dumars' off-guard spot and looked much more comfortable than in his first five games—all off the bench. Stackhouse had 24 points in the first win over Toronto, hitting a key 3-pointer at the end, and 20 points and seven assists in the rematch. —*Steve Addy*



## Wizards

### Fatigue slows Howard's moves to the basket



**Juwan Howard** has struggled lately and one reason could be fatigue. Although he had 19 points and eight rebounds against the Pacers last Friday, he hit only 6-of-18 shots from the field. He had a size advantage over **Chris Mullin**, but Howard was slow to his move. By the time he was ready to release the ball, the Pacers had other defenders in his face. Howard has had to log 40-minute games with the team's frontcourt struggling. ... Three losses last week demonstrated how much the team needs a big man, especially with **Gheorghe Muresan** out with an injury. The Rockets' **Charles Barkley** and **Kevin Willis** controlled the boards, as did the Nets' **Keith Van Horn** and **Jayson Williams**. And Indiana's **Rik Smits** was an intimidating force. All are possible playoff teams that the Wizards need to measure themselves against. ... The return of **Tim Legler** was good news, although its clearly going to take some time for the long-range specialist to get back into playing shape. Legler played 19 minutes in his first game since injuring his hamstring in training camp. He scored five points and missed 4-of-5 shots. —*Jerry Bembray*





## Clippers

### Wright leads stint of successful play



Last week, the team put back-to-back wins together for the first time this season. The team is getting tremendous play from forward/center **Lorenzen Wright**, who averaged 16.4 points in a 10-game span, and the club finally appears to have adjusted after losing forward **Loy Vaught** for the season. But it might be too late. Through the end of last week, the team was nine games behind Minnesota for the final playoff spot. The team proved through the early part of the season that it is at least better than the other subpar Western Conference teams. The Clippers beat Golden State (twice), Sacramento (twice), Dallas and Denver. The key now is to beat some good teams. ... Wright averaged 15.7 rebounds in a nine-game stretch and is dominating the inside. Wright still needs to work on his touch around the basket, but 32 points on the Lakers' **Robert Horry** shows Wright's capability when he's hitting his short jumper. ... The players asked for a consistent playing rotation, and they finally have gotten that. Coach **Bill Fitch**'s starting lineup is beginning to produce, and the bench has played well the entire season. With the players knowing who's going to play when, winning could be easier. —*Gary Washburn*



## Jazz

### Malone deserves credit for keeping team afloat



Power forward **Karl Malone** won't likely win a second straight MVP award, especially with **Michael Jordan** playing what may be his final season. But the Mailman continues to produce as consistently as any player in the league. He helped keep the Jazz afloat during the first 18 games of the season when point guard **John Stockton** was recovering from knee surgery—proving that while he's a perfect target for a passing wizard like Stockton, Malone is still an All-Star on his own merits. Malone led the team in scoring in 27 of Utah's first 29 games and scored 20 or more points in every game but one—he scored 19 in that game. He has done all this despite playing with a splint on the tip of his middle finger on his right (shooting) hand. He'll have surgery on the finger at season's end. ... The Jazz won the 1,000th game in franchise history in the final outting of '97 against Denver. The milestone occurred during the team's 24th season. Since the start of the 1983-84 season, the Jazz have won 62 percent of their games, had 14 straight seasons of .500 or better and 14 consecutive playoff appearances. —*Loren Jorgensen*



## Lakers

### O'Neal returns, but his injury makes him fragile



A stomach watched this closely should be carrying septuplets. But when **Shaquille O'Neal** returned last Friday after six weeks and 20 consecutive games out because of a strained abdominal muscle, he brought with him hopes for a championship season. But the mistake for Lakers fans would be to think O'Neal's abdominal muscle is completely healed since he has returned to action. Not so. The injury is delicate enough that he might need the entire offseason to heal fully. Until then, or at least until a good deal of time has passed without him having a problem, it remains a fragile situation. ... **Elden Campbell** did a commendable job in the 20 games when the team was without O'Neal, averaging 17.5 points and 7.6 rebounds, all the more solid because it came in a relatively low 31.8 minutes per game. ... **Nick Van Exel** and **Eddie Jones** continue to combine in one of the best backcourts in the league. Van Exel has provided stability with ballhandling and leadership and is making a push for consideration as an All-Star reserve. Meanwhile, the fans might vote Jones in as a starter. —*Scott Howard-Cooper*

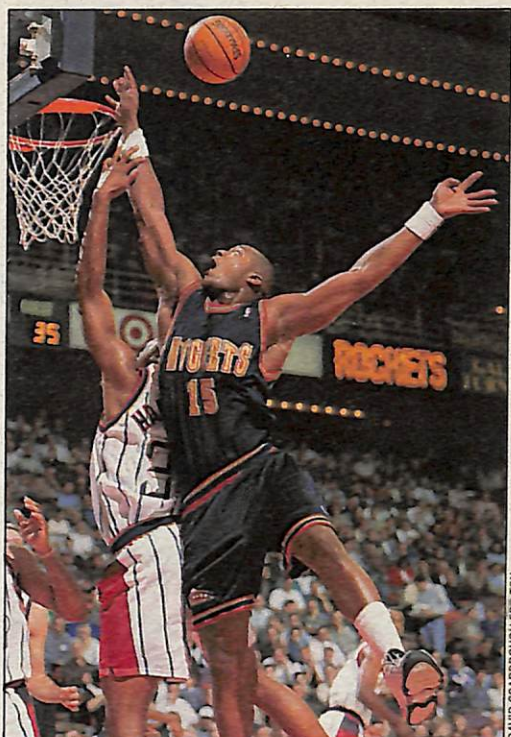


## Grizzlies

### Abdur-Rahim finds spot among elite



**Shareef Abdur-Rahim** was the NBA's third-highest scorer for all of December, averaging 24.8 points per game, which broke his team record of 24.5 points per game set in February. Abdur-Rahim trailed only **Michael Jordan** (28.4) and **Karl Malone** (25.2) in scoring. And he opened January by averaging 26.5 points in his first two games. ... The difference between November and December, from a defensive standpoint, was not encouraging. The team allowed 99.8 points per game in November, 103.1 in December. The difference is startling since the team played 11 games on the road in November and only four on the road in December. ... A team wondering about its 3-point shooting heading into season has done well. The Grizzlies led the NBA in 3-point percentage in December (.471). Leading the way were **Sam Mack**, **Pete Chilcutt** and **Blue Edwards**, who were a combined 39-of-71 (.549). ... Mack's wrist injury, suffered last week, exposed the lack of depth at shooting guard. With **Chris Robinson** rusty following an ankle fracture and **Anthony Peeler** and **Marcus Brown** on the injured list through the end of last week, the heavy load has fallen on Edwards. —*Howard Tsumura*



**FOUL PLAY:** Struggling Fortson is still in the lineup.

## Kings

### Richmond's days with team appear numbered



Less than six weeks before the trading deadline, the team and **Mitch Richmond** still apparently are hoping to part company. It's a shame in one sense that Richmond's departure looks imminent. With the team's rookies playing well, Richmond has adopted a mentor role and seems to enjoy playing with the youngsters. But the bottom line is Richmond is wrapping up a decade in the league, and he never has been close to playing for an NBA championship. However, as time goes by, it becomes more evident the team should have traded Richmond last season. Although the team believes Richmond is worth quite a bit, potential pursuers know they're in a position of leverage because of the duration of the squabble between Richmond and the team. ... Although he's only 6-6, rookie **Tariq Abdul-Wahad**'s success has come at small forward. The team had hoped to convert him into a shooting guard, but that hasn't happened. And Abdul-Wahad's impact has come only recently, with injuries limiting forwards **Billy Owens** and **Lawrence Funderburke**, and **Corliss Williamson** out because of a suspension. —*James Raia*



## Mavericks

### Nelson's draft picks not exactly pick of the litter



**Don Nelson** said center **Chris Anstey** would be the steal of the draft, but right now Anstey appears to be stealing owner **Ross Perot Jr.**'s money. Anstey's limited strength and durability hamper him even in practice, and last week Anstey was placed on the injured list with a sprained ankle. Nelson also was high on second-round pick **Bubba Wells**, and like Anstey, Wells hasn't done much. At 6-5, Wells is not quick enough to get off his shot, and he's too small to defend against bigger forwards. It's looking like another wasted draft for the Mavericks. ... The team is more competitive with center **Shawn Bradley** back in the lineup and with **Eric Riley** as his backup. With Bradley back from his calf injury, **Samaki Walker** can play power forward, and he should benefit from Bradley's presence. And forward **A.C. Green**, whose back is giving him problems, will come off the bench and keep his NBA record consecutive games streak intact. ... Former Mavericks forward **Mark Aguirre** has been added to the scouting staff. Aguirre will evaluate talent and work with the team's big men in practice. —*Ken Sins*



## Nuggets

### Hanzlik avoids mutiny for now by playing vets



A line was drawn through the center of the locker room, veterans on one side, first-year coach **Bill Hanzlik** and a cast of rookies on the other. The veterans, feeling forsaken in the rush to get the rookies more experience, argued Hanzlik should sacrifice his rookies' playing time for a few victories and some self-respect. A mutiny was at hand, and Hanzlik had to do something quickly. By week's end, the coach gave in, and the team played its best all-around game of the year, albeit a one-point loss to the Rockets, last Friday behind a mostly veteran lineup. Still, Hanzlik vows to use the young players and play for the future. ... Rookie power forwards **Danny Fortson** and **Tony Battie** are struggling from the field and can't stay out of foul trouble, especially when playing against veteran competition. Combine that with center **Dean Garrett**'s problems in the pivot, and the team's front line is in awful shape. The only bright spot is **LaPhonso Ellis**' improved field-goal percentage and the play of recently discovered **Harold Ellis**, who can play either shooting guard or small forward. —*Curtis Eichelberger*





## Rockets

### Hot Barkley still can't catch Worm



Charles Barkley can't catch a break in the rebounding race. He had a nice string of double-figure board nights and his average was rolling along at about 14 per game. And still **Dennis Rodman** left him in the dust. Barkley is having solid rebounding games, but Rodman is having incredible ones. Barkley is wrestling New Jersey's **Jayson Williams** for second best in the department. ... The team's defense has been horrible lately—and everyone knows it. In one recent stretch, the team gave up more than 100 points to Utah, Washington, Charlotte and even Denver, the worst team in the league. ... The team had three sets of back-to-back games in November and December. It has five such scheduling pains in January. ... **Kevin Willis** continues to carry the team in **Hakeem Olajuwon's** absence. Willis is averaging nearly 20 points and more than 10 rebounds per game as a starter and should be a cinch for the All-Star Game. ... Barkley has been solid on the offensive end and **Mario Elie** at the more-important defensive end. Alas, Elie has no help in putting shackles on the opponents. ... Olajuwon, who has begun light shooting and jogging, is expected back in early February. —Eddie Sefko



## Suns

### Ainge wants to hire an experienced aide



The team lost assistant **Donn Nelson** to the Mavericks and his father, Mavs G.M. and coach **Don Nelson**. Though the move long has been anticipated, the younger Nelson had said he would finish his five-year contract with the Suns. He was in the second year of that deal. But when the elder Nelson dangled the head-coaching job—he will take over in 2000-2001—the decision was obvious. **Donn Nelson** wanted to remain on the Phoenix bench this season, but coach **Danny Ainge** told him to go ahead and join the Mavs. ... With Nelson, Ainge had the youngest staff in the league by far. Neither he nor any of his three assistants were older than 39. Ainge says he has three candidates for Nelson's job, and all are older. "Experience," Ainge said when asked what he wants in his next assistant. ... **Tom Chambers** was added as a consultant and will work with the team's big men. ... With **Danny Manning** out with a strained abdomen, **Clifford Robinson** should be a more integral part of the offense. The team has been at its best when Robinson is involved. In its first 19 wins, he averaged more than 14 points. In its first nine losses, he averaged four points. —Bob Young

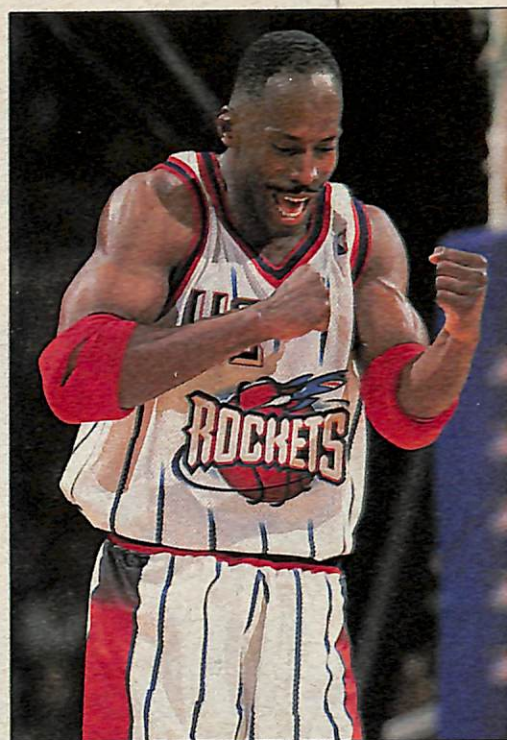


## Timberwolves

### Win over Bulls tainted by bad call off the court



The Bulls' annual visit to Target Center last Tuesday was a major departure. The Wolves beat the defending champs, 99-95, to end Chicago's 16-0 mastery in the series. ... The team is cooperating with the NBA in investigating the crank phone call to Target Center that claimed **Michael Jordan's** mother had been hospitalized. The message caused Jordan to worry and desperately try to reach a family member by phone at halftime. In the second half, he shot 4-of-14, and the Bulls were outscored by 13 points. ... **Tom Gugliotta** had been playing All-Star ball of late, but missed last Friday's game against the Celtics with the flu. The team is 12-4 when he scores at least 20 points. ... In a recent 16-game stretch, **Kevin Garnett** led the team in rebounding nine times. But he seemed to miss Gugliotta's presence. ... At center, **Cherokee Parks** and **Stanley Roberts** are sort of an ineffective Mr. Outside-Mr. Inside. Forward/center **Tom Hammonds** has carved out a niche as the muscular and experienced option down the stretch. That relegates Roberts and Parks to the bench late in games. —Steve Aschburner



ALL-STAR SUB: Willis' numbers have been a dream.

## Trail Blazers

### Rebounding, defense remain crucial strengths



When veteran front-line players **Clifford Robinson** and **Chris Dudley** left in the offseason, the consensus was their rebounding and defense would be dearly missed. So far, however, the two categories have remained strengths. With **Arvydas Sabonis** and newcomer **Brian Grant** leading the way, the team remains near the top of the rebounding charts. More surprising, this remains a good interior defensive club, holding teams to .420 shooting through the end of December. "The strength of our team is defense," coach **Mike Dunleavy** says. Here's why: 1) Grant is an even better inside defender than expected, and **Rasheed Wallace**—playing small forward for the first time—has worked hard to cover mistakes. 2) Rookies **Kelvin Cato** and **Alvin Williams** are excellent defenders and have added a lot to the collective effort. 3) The team has been smart on team defense, helping hide the inadequacies of **Isaiah Rider** and **Kenny Anderson**. ... Anderson finally is injury-free after struggling through the first two months. But his game is not completely in sync, and he seems to be looking over his shoulder a bit at Williams. —Kerry Eggers



## Spurs

### Someone old, someone new fuel rise



This isn't a recording—**David Robinson** and **Tim Duncan** continue to perform at a high level. Duncan captured his second straight Rookie of the Month honor in December. And Robinson looks like the 1995 league MVP. Duncan and Robinson combined for 49 points and 23 rebounds in an 84-77 victory over the Atlantic Division-leading Heat in Miami. It was the 10th win in 11 games. ... **Sean Elliott** finally came to life in an 8-for-13 performance from the field against Vancouver. But then he returned to hibernation with a 3-for-8 effort in 18 minutes against Portland. ... **Avery Johnson** has been Mr. Assist. In a recent 10-game stretch he averaged nearly 12 per game. ... Although **Jaren Jackson** is no **Vinny Del Negro**, he does give the team one positive while starting in place of the injured Del Negro at shooting guard—good free-throw shooting. Jackson's 81.8 percent from the line is tops for a club that ranks last in the league. ... Coach **Gregg Popovich** believes good defense will keep the team in games on nights it can't shoot. He preaches defense and rebounding, and the team's current streak shows his message is getting through. —Kevin O'Keefe



## SuperSonics

### Team eager for tests against league's elite



The team has taken care of business thus far and beaten the opponents it should. But after a string of games against sub-.500 teams, the desire to test where it stands against the elite is starting to show. Coach **George Karl** planned to conduct a series of meetings with his coaches and players to maintain their strength, with a tough stretch in plain view. The team plays winning teams in 16 of its next 22 games, including Miami, Chicago, the Lakers, Houston and Utah. Karl is concerned the team has become too offensively oriented during its success. "Right now, offensively, we're playing very well. I don't want to be an offensive team. We still need to initiate the game with defense," he says. ... **Detlef Schrempf** is the team's quiet assassin, averaging 17 points in four recent games. He is taking advantage of post-ups while **Vin Baker** continues to draw double teams. ... Is **Gary Payton** an early favorite for league MVP? He recorded his seventh career triple-double last week at Golden State. In a span of 1½ weeks, he averaged 23 points, 11 assists and seven rebounds and shot 62 percent from the field. —Ronald Tillery



## Warriors

### The rest of the month will not be golden



During the rest of the month, it looks as if the team will have a tough time winning games. The Warriors started by playing Atlanta on Wednesday. Immediately following is a six-game, nine-day East Coast trip (Detroit, Chicago, Minnesota, Milwaukee, Atlanta, Philadelphia). The team also plays at Utah, Seattle and Portland, with home games against Phoenix and Chicago. Because of the brutal stretch, the Warriors stand an excellent chance of falling short of double-digit wins when they reach the month of February. ... **Bimbo Coles** has gradually picked up the scoring slack in the backcourt the past two weeks. He has averaged 12.7 points in the past six games. ... By the end of this month, **Latrell Sprewell's** situation will have been resolved and the team's current cap room determined. The only remaining unknown will be the trade value of its players. It might be time for **Todd Fuller**, **Dickey Simpkins** and **David Vaughn** to be showcased. Coach **P.J. Carlesimo** will play people and assess their value—and make some moves to get the franchise firmly on the rebuilding path. —David Steele







Larry Wigge

## Insider

# Oilers start Roman empire; Lightning get life of Bryan

**Y**ou used to need a sundial to time the passing drills out of the Edmonton zone. But last week chaos was replaced by perfect timing. Every lead pass was crisp and accurate, tape to tape.

At the practice rink, everyone stopped to watch because new hope had come to the Oilers.

Roman Hamrlik was minus-37 playing in Tampa Bay in 1997. But he had suddenly, magically, rediscovered the talent that made him the first overall pick in the 1992 draft, that led him to the NHL's All-Star Game in 1996—the midpoint of a season when he scored 16 goals and added 49 assists. Was it just one of those glimpses of brilliance so many young and promising players show, before they disappoint everyone?

He had one assist in his first game with the Oilers, a 5-3 loss to Montreal last Friday, but that didn't quash the optimism about acquiring a defenseman with Hamrlik's skills.

"When we played him in New York, he was one of those guys that we targeted," says Edmonton defenseman Kevin Lowe, who won five Stanley Cups with the Oilers and one with the Rangers. "We wanted to wear him down, like Ray Bourque."

Ray Bourque? Come on now.

Too many giveaways in Tampa Bay. Too many nights with the Lightning when he was simply

## More dealing

Canucks coach Mike Keenan says the Edmonton-Tampa Bay trade could open the floodgates for more trades after a quiet first half of the season.

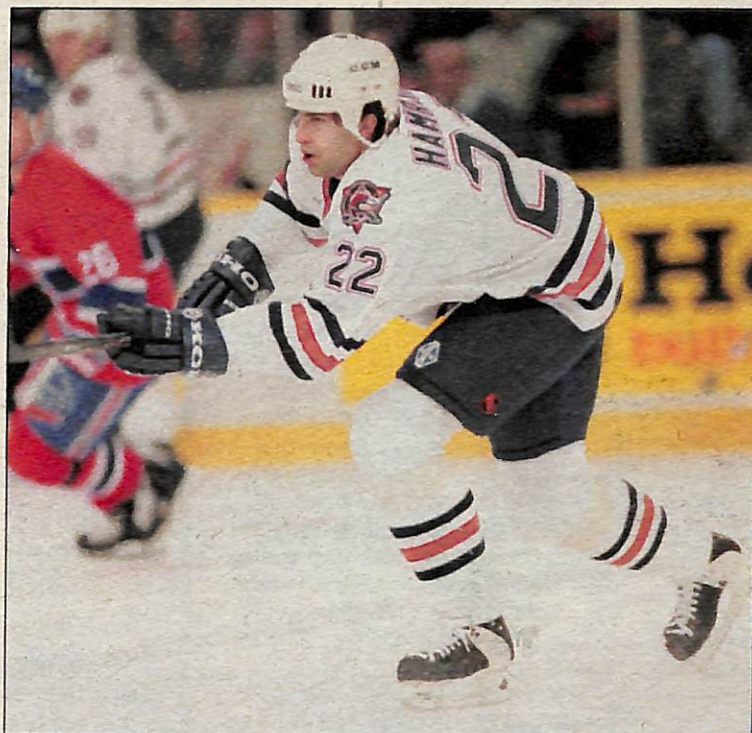
"Most teams have 40-42 games left in the season—and they have to do something to assure their position in the playoffs," he says.

Trying to keep up with the Joneses—or the Edmontonians in this case—the Canucks responded to the division rival Oilers by sending goaltender Kirk McLean and left winger Martin Gélinas to Carolina for goalie Sean Burke, left winger Geoff Sanderson and defenseman Enrico Ciccone in a deal that definitely favors Vancouver.

The Canucks were coming off an 8-0 loss to Philadelphia and a 2-9-3 December, second-worst in team history.

The key to the deal is Burke, who gives Vancouver the steady goaltender they didn't have. Burke was his team's MVP the last two seasons, keeping a weak team in the game most nights.

Gélinas and Sanderson were having off-seasons. A change in scenery, it is hoped, will change their scoring touch. Ciccone adds a physical presence to a defense that just lost veteran Dana Murzyn with what could be a career-threatening knee injury.



**GET TO THE POINT:** Hamrlik will provide two things the Oilers desperately need—a rocket shot on the power play, and an outlet pass from the zone.

tired of all of the losing, tired of coach Terry Crisp yelling at him.

"I thought he'd come to the front more. But he didn't," Lightning G.M. Phil Esposito remembers. "There were flashes, though. Oh, boy, were there flashes of brilliance. But that's in the past now."

It's in the past for the Lightning, who continue to suffer through mediocrity. Mediocrity that led to them giving up on a 23-year-old prospect who still flashes brilliance along with draft choice Paul Comrie, a center, for defenseman Bryan Marchment and young centers Steve Kelly and Jason Bonsignore. It's a trade that could return the Oilers to the speedy and aggressive team that upset Dallas in the first round of the playoffs last spring.

"He can be one of the three best defensemen in the NHL," says Flyers coach Wayne Cashman, who worked with Hamrlik as an assistant coach in Tampa Bay from 1992-93 through '95-96.

One thing is clear. Sather had to use his best arm-twisting to convince representatives of the Alberta Treasury Department to allow the financially troubled team to take on a \$2.6 million salary. That's how much he thinks of Hamrlik.

Esposito, center poor with John Cullen battling cancer, Brian Bradley fighting post-concussion syndrome and Chris Gratton traded to Philadelphia in the offseason, wanted Jason Arnott for Hamrlik. But Sather did an even more persuasive

job of selling Espo on the fact that Bonsignore, the fourth pick overall in the 1994 draft, reminded him of Phil Esposito before he got his chance to play in the NHL.

Bonsignore had been exiled by the Edmonton organization, on loan to San Antonio of the International Hockey League. The Oilers considered him a bust. Esposito, whose job is on the line, liked the youth and speed of Kelly and Bonsignore, both former first-round picks, and the toughness of Marchment. With Marchment, Igor Ulanov and Jamie Huscroft, Lightning coach Jacques Demers figures he has the toughest defense in the Eastern Conference.

The truth, however, is the Oilers had given up trying to defend Marchment, who was suspended for three games for putting Dallas center Mike Modano out for six weeks, and appears to be a target for more suspensions for his borderline hits.

"The referees watch him. The league watches him. The NHL is trying to change rules to stop his kind of play, and if Bryan doesn't change his game he won't play a lot," Sather says. "They're going to keep suspending him. If he hits somebody else again with a knee this year, he'll get 30 games."

Earlier this season, coach Ron Low blamed his team's lack of scoring on the defense and its many foibles with the puck, which included March-

ment.

"We've got one guy on defense who couldn't pass the collection plate, another who can't even skate with the puck and another who thinks the puck is going to explode like a hand grenade every time he touches it," Low said. "If you don't have a decent outlet pass, all of our speed up front goes for naught."

Hamrlik can provide that pass, not to mention a rocket shot.

"He's got a great shot, a heavy shot," says Flyers center Chris Gratton, who followed in Hamrlik's footsteps as Tampa Bay's top pick in '93. "He's great on the power play. He really moves the puck well. He'll be really good for Edmonton."

Hamrlik may be an absolute steal.

"I'd say he's got one of the five hardest shots from the point in the league," says Oilers goalie Curtis Joseph.

"He beat me twice in a game last year, but they wiped one out because a guy was in the crease. You get a guy who can shoot like he can and there's a buzz in the crowd."

And there's also a buzz around the NHL about Edmonton getting Hamrlik for Marchment. **TSN**

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## The book on Jocelyn Thibault

Canadiens, G 5-11 / 170

He wasn't intimidated by playing against his former team—or his former idol. Thibault stopped 25 shots and matched Patrick Roy save for save in a 1-1 tie at Colorado last week.

"Growing up in Montreal, I studied his every move," Thibault says. "A lot of the things you saw me doing, I'm doing because I saw him do them."

A first-round pick (10th overall) in the 1993 draft by Québec, Thibault has rebounded nicely from an off season (he was booed mightily by the knowledgeable Montreal fans after going 22-24-11 in '96-97). His biggest technical problem was going down too soon to make a save.

"I was a mess and needed reinforcement—and there was none," he says of the Canadiens' firing of goaltending coach François Allaire.

During the offseason, Thibault sought out Allaire. Allaire's advice was to challenge while staying square to shooters. That advice, and a coaching change in Montreal, helped Thibault reconsider his trade request.

"I considered a trade because of the booing and the strange looks I got from



ELSA HASCH / ALLSPORT

people when I went out on the town, but then changed my mind," he says.

"You can't lose a couple of games in Montreal and not face the pressure," Roy says. "I know how tough it is—I faced it, too. Josh just needed to grow up a little to be able to face it better."

Alain Vigneault made it easy for Thibault, splitting the goaltending duties with veteran Andy Moog. Thibault has repaid the rookie coach with an 11-7-4 record and 2.39 goals-against average.

"Name a 22-year-old goaltender who is better," Vigneault says. "Could he be the next Patrick Roy? Maybe not. But I'm not betting against him."

## TSN's Power Poll

Rk.	Team	W-L-T	Comment
1.	Dallas	26-9-7	The system works. Team goes 7-2-2 without Modano.
2.	Detroit	25-10-8	Ex-Wings goalies Vernon, Essensa have inflicted four of those losses.
3.	Colorado	21-8-13	Power play is beginning to click and defense is tightening up.
4.	New Jersey	25-12-2	McKay a trigger man? Has Devils first goal in 10 games this season.
5.	Philadelphia	23-10-7	Depth? A solid 6-1-1 record after playing the previous night.
6.	Pittsburgh	21-12-8	Tough in tight games—9-2 record in one-goal results.
7.	Montreal	22-15-6	Corson's 14 goals, 42 points are Comeback of the Year material.
8.	St. Louis	22-15-6	MacInnis set to return—and none too soon.
9.	Washington	18-15-8	Caps start winning by going to the net harder than ever.
10.	Phoenix	18-16-7	Competitive Tocchet continues to go above and beyond call of duty.
11.	Boston	17-16-8	McLaren keeps growing as a young defenseman.
12.	Ottawa	18-18-5	Only hope on offense is to get Alfredsson back soon.
13.	Los Angeles	16-17-7	Last year if the Kings fell behind, you could count them out. No more.
14.	Chicago	14-18-8	Nabokov is bigger contributor than he was in the minors.
15.	N.Y. Rangers	12-18-12	No Kovalev trade means coach Campbell once again is on hot seat.
16.	San Jose	15-20-5	Penalty killing continues to keep the Sharks in games.
17.	Florida	15-20-7	Tikkanen's return helps Panthers win only fifth home game of '97-98.
18.	N.Y. Islanders	15-21-5	Salo has been yanked from net in his last couple of road disasters.
19.	Carolina	15-21-5	McLean-Kidd is not as formidable in goal as Burke-Kidd.
20.	Buffalo	14-19-7	Just three wins this season when opponent scores first.
21.	Toronto	13-19-7	Johnson gets two more goals, makes bid for Rookie of the Year.
22.	Anaheim	13-21-7	Has been held to two goals or fewer 24 times this season.
23.	Edmonton	11-21-9	No Roman holiday for Oilers yet, but defense is better with Hamrik.
24.	Calgary	11-23-8	Pugnacious Peluso forced to end his career with a neck injury.
25.	Vancouver	11-23-6	Keenan calls his team quitters and swings a major trade.
26.	Tampa Bay	9-23-8	Kelly, Borsignore show speed, but Lightning still need a miracle.

Through last Friday's games.

The Sporting News NHL Power Poll is determined by TSN Hockey Editor Larry Wigge.

## inside dish

FRONT OFFICE  
RUMBLINGS  
AND LOCKER  
ROOM  
WHISPERS  
FROM LARRY  
WIGGE

Don't believe for a moment the Oilers are finished trading. The more No. 1 center **Doug Weight** sings the praises of New Jersey right winger **Bill Guerin**, the more Edmonton G.M. **Glen Sather** forgets the difference in age between the 27-year-old Guerin and 23-year-old center **Jason Arnott**, who has only five goals and often is the target of boo-birds in Edmonton. "(Guerin's) a total team guy. He's got great speed, great vision and he can pass the puck. He does it all. And I think he can take a lot more steps as a player. I think he can get better in different surroundings," says Weight, who played a lot with Guerin during the World Cup in September 1996. Sather would like to acquire Guerin (who was promised a trade before the end of the season by Devils G.M. **Lou Lamoriello**)

and rookie winger **Patrik Elias** for Arnott. But he likely will have to settle for left winger **Valeri Zelepukin** along with Guerin for Arnott. ... With that trade possibility and Vancouver trading for Carolina left winger **Geoff Sanderson**, where does that leave the Rangers in their attempt to get something for enigmatic forward **Alexei Kovalev**? It leaves G.M. **Neil Smith** with no trade and a greater likelihood he will have to fire coach **Colin Campbell**. "There's no cushion on our chair," he says. "We're sitting on the springs." ... Pittsburgh G.M. **Craig Patrick** may not be able to sign free-agent left winger **Petr Nedved** after all. Patrick tried to up his last offer the last week of December, only to find out Nedved had played in four games for a third-division team in the Czech Republic to stay in shape. Nedved's agent claims he cleared the move with the NHL Players Association because Novy Jicin isn't considered a professional team. Barring a change in the NHL's position, the Penguins cannot sign Nedved again without subjecting him to waivers until the end of the season. "Right now, we're in a waiting mode," Patrick says of an appeal the Penguins have filed with the NHL. ... With the Avalanche at 13 ties and the Rangers at 12, there's a buzz around the league that coaches had better stop playing for ties in overtime or they may have to face more talk of shootouts. ... If the players in the Buffalo locker room are still against goalie **Dominik Hasek**, it sure isn't affecting last year's league MVP. Not when Hasek became the first netminder since **George Hainsworth** in 1928-29 to post six shutouts in one month. ... In his midseason report, G.M. **Jim Rutherford** says the Hurricanes will lose at least \$20 million in their first season in Carolina. Which means giving away cars and offering free tickets hasn't fooled fans into thinking this is a good team.



**PRO OR CON?** The Nedved free-agent saga continues to be most unappealing for Penguins management.





## Inside the Game With Mike Keenan

### Indefensible

My first response to the Tampa Bay-Edmonton trade is that the Lightning may have given up too soon on a young defenseman like Roman Hamrlik. Getting a quality defenseman is one of the most difficult commodities to obtain in a trade, because they're so scarce.

When I was in Chicago and in St. Louis, we set the acquisition of a premier defenseman as a priority for our teams. Those people turned out to be Chris Chelios and Chris Pronger. We felt we could not win a Stanley Cup without a premier defenseman. Only time will tell whether Hamrlik is that kind of player, but he will get a fresh start in Edmonton.

We don't have that premier defenseman in Vancouver yet, but it won't stop us from continuing to shop around. Our first move here, however, was in goal, where Kirk McLean just didn't give us the consistent goaltending we need. Getting Sean Burke from Carolina for McLean was key because we feel he can make the big saves to keep us in games—until we can make that move for a premier defenseman.

It's funny, but each decade has brought us great defensemen. You can see veterans such as Chelios, Ray Bourque, Paul Coffey and Larry Murphy still are impact players on their teams. So is Brian Leetch with the Rangers. And we won't quit shopping around until we find a premier defenseman of our own.



### COUNTDOWN TO NAGANO

Forget the debate about whether Canada will miss Mark Messier's leadership, or whether the defense is too old for the wide Olympic ice surface in Nagano in February. Speedy Mighty Ducks left winger Paul Kariya says the gold medal will come down to goaltending.

"Every time Canada does well internationally, goaltending has been the focal point," he says. "And with Patrick Roy, Martin Brodeur and Curtis Joseph, you can't go wrong."

Bill Ranford's solid performance at the 1994 world championships and Grant Fuhr's heroics at the 1987 Canada Cup bottom-lined Canada's supremacy. And Mike Richter's brilliant play for the United States at the 1996 World Cup tournament is even further proof of goaltending bringing home the gold.

Don't bet against Roy and Brodeur in Nagano.



**A PAT HAND?** Roy gives Canada an edge in Nagano.

## FIRST-YEAR SUCCESS STORIES



**HAT TRICK:** Vincent Damphousse played for Jacques Demers and Mario Tremblay before Vigneault arrived.

SOURCE: NHL GRAPHIC BY MIKE NYERGES / TSN

Picking the right coach is a difficult task, but the Montreal Canadiens have plenty of success—Pat Burns, Toe Blake and Claude Ruel. Little-known Alain Vigneault may not be on the same pace of those coaches, but his 22-15-6 record (.595 percentage) still helps carry on the proud tradition of the Canadiens' coaching choices and first-year coaches in general.



Vigneault

Coach	Season	Team	W	L	T	Pct.
Pete Green	1919-20	Ottawa	19	5	0	.792
Tom Johnson	1970-71	Boston	57	14	7	.776
Bep Guidolin <sup>†</sup>	1972-73	Boston	20	6	0	.769
Dave Gill	1926-27	Ottawa	30	10	4	.727
Pat Burns	1988-89	Montreal	53	18	9	.719
Toe Blake	1955-56	Montreal	45	15	10	.714
Mike Keenan*	1984-85	Philadelphia	53	20	7	.706
Cooney Weiland	1939-40	Boston	31	12	5	.698
Jimmy Skinner	1954-55	Detroit	42	17	11	.679
Joe Primeau	1950-51	Toronto	41	16	13	.679
Claude Ruel	1968-69	Montreal	46	19	11	.678
Marc Crawford*	1994-95	Quebec	30	13	5	.677

<sup>†</sup> Replaced Tom Johnson in middle of season.  
\*Active

### INDIVIDUAL SCORING LEADERS

PLAYER	GP	G	A	PTS	+/-	PIM	PPSH	GW	GT	S	PCTG	
FORSBERG, Col	39	16	37	53	7	50	5	1	3	1 125	12.8	
LECLAIR, Phi	40	31	18	49	19	20	9	0	5	0 159	19.5	
BURE, Van	40	25	22	47	5	24	7	3	4	0 153	16.3	
JAGR, Pit	37	19	28	47	7	26	4	0	7	1 127	15.0	
LINDROS, Phi	39	17	30	47	9	74	4	0	3	0 125	13.6	
SELANNE, Anh	41	32	13	45	5	20	6	0	5	2 154	20.8	
SAKIC, Col	42	18	26	44	8	26	9	0	1	0 170	10.6	
FRANCIS, Pit	41	14	30	44	2	6	4	0	4	1	97	14.4
RECCHI, Mon	43	19	24	43	15	21	3	1	3	0	96	19.8
TKACHUK, Pho	40	25	17	42	10	95	7	0	5	1 131	19.1	
LAFONTAINE, NYR	42	16	26	42	-9	24	6	0	2	3 110	14.5	
CORSON, Mon	43	14	28	42	5	47	10	0	1	0	85	16.5
REICHEL, NYI	41	16	24	40	-2	18	4	0	0	0	110	14.5
STUMPEL, LA	40	11	29	40	3	34	3	0	2	1	80	13.8
FLEURY, Cgy	42	15	24	39	14	107	1	2	2	1 133	11.3	
ALLISON, Bos	41	13	26	39	14	27	2	0	5	1	64	20.3
OATES, Was	41	10	29	39	-1	10	1	1	3	0	69	14.5

### ROOKIE SCORING LEADERS

PLAYER	GP	G	A	PTS	+/-	PIM	PPSH	GW	GT	S	PCTG	
JOHNSON, Tor	39	9	18	27	-3	4	3	0	0	1	73	12.3
STURM, SJ	39	7	13	20	0	20	1	0	3	0	64	10.9
ELIAS, NJ	35	12	7	19	11	14	3	0	5	0	58	20.7
ZEDNIK, Was	40	12	6	18	-3	22	2	0	1	0	99	12.1
PROSPAL, Phi	40	5	13	18	-10	17	4	0	0	0	60	8.3
MORRIS, Cgy	42	5	11	16	5	33	3	1	0	1	60	8.3
OHLUND, Van	39	2	14	16	7	30	0	0	0	0	95	2.1
WASHBURN, Fla	31	8	6	14	-1	22	3	0	2	0	36	22.2
MARLEAU, SJ	37	7	6	13	-4	10	1	0	0	0	42	16.7
ERIKSSON, Det	29	5	8	13	17	20	0	0	2	0	39	12.8

### DEFENSEMAN SCORING LEADERS

PLAYER	GP	G	A	PTS	+/-	PIM	PPSH	GW	GT	S	PCTG
ZUBOV, Dal	42	6	28	34	14	2	2	1	2	1	79.7
LIDSTROM, Det	42	14	18	32	8	14	5	1	1	116	12.1
MURPHY, Det	43	4	28	32	22	21	1	0	2	0	58.6
DUCHESNE, STL	43	5	26	31	8	16	1	0	0	0	82.6
NIEDERMAYER, NJ	39	7	22	29	7	16	6	0	1	0	84.8

### GOALS-AGAINST AVERAGE/SAVE PERCENTAGE

GOALTENDER	GPI	MINS	GA	AVG	SA	SV%	W	L	T
BRODEUR, NJ	31	1846	55	1.79	729	.925	23	7	1
BELFOUR, Dal	34	1994	61	1.84	699	.913	20	6	7
TUGNUTT, Ott	21	1203	37	1.85	452	.918	10	7	3
HEXTALL, Phi	20	1188	39	1.97	467	.916	12	4	4
BARRASSO, Pit	34	1862	65	2.09	797	.918	17	8	6
HACKETT, Chi	23	1397	50	2.15	612	.918	7	8	8

### GOALS

NAME	GP	G
SELANNE, Anh	41	32
LECLAIR, Phi	40	31
BURE, Van	40	25
TKACHUK, Pho	40	25
BONDRA, Was	37	23
JAGR, Pit	37	19
HULL, STL	38	19
PALFFY, NYI	41	19
RECCHI, Mon	43	19
SHANAHAN, Det	39	18
SAKIC, Col	42	18
NIEUWENDYK, Dal	35	17
LINDROS, Phi	39	17
HOLIK, NJ	39	17
PERREAU, LA	40	17
L'NBUNNER, Dal	42	17

### ASSISTS

NAME	GP	A
FORSBERG, Col	39	37
LINDROS, Phi	39	30
JANNEY, Pho	41	30
FRANCIS, Pit	41	30
STUMPEL, LA	40	29
OATES, Was	41	29
JAGR, Pit	37	28
ZUBOV, Dal	42	28
MURPHY, Det	43	28
CORSON, Mon	43	28
KOIVU, Mon	43	28
ALLISON, Bos	41	26
GRETZKY, NYR	42	26
LAFONTAINE, NYR	42	26
SAKIC, Col	42	26
DUCHESNE, STL	43	26

### POWER-PLAY GOALS

NAME	GP	PPG
CORSON, Mon	43	10
SHANAHAN, Det	39	9
LECLAIR, Phi	40	9
SAKIC, Col	42	9
BERARD, NYI	35	8
HULL, STL	38	8
BONDRA, Was	37	7
BURE, Van	40	7
TKACHUK, Pho	40	7

KHRISTICH, Bos	41	7
WEIGHT, Edm	41	7

### GAME WINNERS

NAME	GP	GWG
JAGR, Pit	37	7
ROBITAILLE, LA	40	6
ELIAS, NJ	35	5
BONDRA, Was	37	5
FRIESEN, SJ	37	5
HULL, STL	38	5
SHANAHAN, Det	39	5
SAKIC, Col	39	5
HOLIK, NJ	39	5
TKACHUK, Pho	40	5
LECLAIR, Phi	40	5
SELANNE, Anh	41	5
ALLISON, Bos	41	5
DEADMARSH, Col	41	5
KAPANEN, Car	41	5

### SHOTS

NAME	GP	S
SAKIC, Col	42	170
LECLAIR, Phi	40	159
SELANNE, Anh	41	154
BURE, Van	40	153
SHANAHAN, Det	39	149
LEMIEUX, Col	41	144
YASHIN, Ott	41	141
AMONTE, Chi	40	138
SMYTH, Edm	41	138

### FIRST GOALS

NAME	GP	FG
SELANNE, Anh	41	11
NIEUWENDYK, Dal	35	8
SAKIC, Col	42	8
BRIND'AMOUR, Phi	40	7
L'NBUNNER, Dal	42	7

### PLUS MINUS

NAME	GP	+/-
MURPHY, Det	43	22
PRONGER, STL	43	22
ZUBRUS, Phi	30	21
SYDOR, Dal	39	20
MCKAY, NJ	39	19
LECLAIR, Phi	40	19
KRUPP, Col	42	19





Peter Schmuck

## The wind just might blow in the Cubs' favor this year

It's madness, I know, but I've been struck with a slight case of Cubs fever. Maybe it's the way the planets are aligned. Maybe it's El Nino. Maybe it's just the lingering suspicion that the N.L.

Central will be so soft that even the long-suffering Cubs have a puncher's chance.

The arrival of free-swinging Henry Rodriguez will beef up the heart of the batting order and—at least in theory—take some of the pressure off \$10 million slugger Sammy Sosa. The two don't figure to match the cross-town run-production of Frank Thomas and Albert Belle, but they should make a big impact on the divisional race.

Factor in shortstop Jeff Blauser and second baseman Mickey Morandini, a couple of off-season acquisitions—and the Cubs are starting to exude an aura of legitimacy.

Here's what they are up against:

- The defending division champion Astros, who lost their winningest pitcher (Darryl Kile) to free agency and didn't exactly set the world on fire with 84 regular-season victories in 1997.

- The enigmatic Cardinals, who likely will enter the season as the consensus favorites but finished 16 games under .500 last year and have some holes in their pitching staff.

- The upstart Pirates, who stayed in contention all last season with baseball's smallest payroll but finished under .500 (79-83) in what most agree was a best-case scenario.

- The unpredictable Reds, who figure to be competitive but not particularly impressive.

- And the Brewers, who could be one of the best or worst teams in the division, depending on how quickly they adapt to the National League style of play.

OK, so this isn't exactly a ringing endorsement of the new-look Cubs, but if they can get even an adequate performance from a couple young pitchers, they should be in the hunt in baseball's only six-team race.



**FILLING CUBBIE HOLES: Morandini is one of three important North Side acquisitions.**

### Feeling adrift

Mariners lefthander Randy Johnson has grown tired of all the trade speculation that has risen up around him, and he wants the club to make a deal before the start of the season.

"If I had my wish, I would have already been traded by now," Johnson told the *Tacoma News Tribune* last week. "It is an uncomfortable situation knowing I am not going to be there beyond next year."

The Mariners reportedly are talking trade with the Yankees and Indians, either of which would become a clear-cut favorite to reach the World Series with Johnson in their rotation.

Promising Jeremi Gonzalez won 11 games in 23 starts last season after earning a place in the rotation in late May, and the organization is hoping that top pitching prospect Kerry Wood will step up similarly in 1998.

The Cubs also were buoyed by the performance of righthander Mark Clark, who won 6-of-7 decisions after coming from the Mets.

The outlook may depend on righthanders Kevin Tapani (9-3 in 13 starts) and Steve Trachsel (8-12), who will have to provide some leadership if the Cubs are to be a threat.

Bullpen depth is a weakness. Righthander

Terry Adams was the club leader in saves last year with 18, but he went 2-9 with a 4.62 ERA. The club doesn't think he's ready and has been courting free agent Rod Beck.

The front office already has addressed the team's lack of power. The Cubs ranked a respectable fifth in the league in batting average (.263) but were 12th in runs (687) and 13th in home runs (127). That's why it was so important to add Rodriguez, who has averaged 31 home runs and 93 RBIs the past two seasons.

The Cubs also shored up their infield defense when they signed Blauser and got Morandini from the Phillies for Doug Glanville. Glanville figured to be odd man out in the outfield, where Sosa will play right, Lance Johnson center and Rodriguez left.

The overall defense appears solid. The offense is improved. The pitching is sketchy, but the wind just might be blowing in the right direction at Wrigley Field this season. **TSN**

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## inside dish

FRONT OFFICE RUMBLINGS AND LOCKER ROOM WHISPERS

Talk of a possible trade involving Twins second baseman **Chuck Knoblauch** persists, but a deal seems illogical if the team hopes to convince Minneapolis politicians to approve public funding for a new stadium. The Twins can't afford to alienate anyone, and dumping a popular player is a certain way to turn public opinion further against a new ballpark. ... The disappointing



**HALT: If the Twins are wise, the Knoblauch trade talks will be all talk and no trade.**

performance of Yankees import **Hideki Irabu** apparently has not discouraged the Red Sox from pursuing an agreement for Asian pitcher **Sang Lee**. G.M. **Dan Duquette** doesn't mind gambling if the upside is another display of his administrative genius, and he apparently is intent on tapping the international player-development market. ... The renovation of the Angels' ballpark is far from complete, and it now looks as if there will still be construction areas when the season opens. The club has raised ticket prices significantly for the new/old ballpark, so there might be some grumbling. ... The Orioles have followed through with their plan to raise ticket prices. The decision is consistent with owner **Peter Angelos'** insistence that the club break even financially, but it didn't sit well in Baltimore—especially in light of reports that the franchise rolled up \$140 million in gross revenues in 1997. ... The Mets have balked at giving reliever **John Franco** a contract extension, but both sides have stifled speculation that he might be traded before the start of the season. One reason: The Mets believe they have a shot at making the playoffs.



# Astros



**BARGAIN HUNTING:** Lacking the financial resources to acquire a front-line starting pitcher after losing **Darryl Kile** to free agency, G.M. **Gerry Hunsicker** is hoping someone might surprise and win a turn in the rotation, as Rule 5 pickup **Ramon Garcia** did last season. Thinking along those lines, Hunsicker signed **Roger Salkeld**, 26, to a minor league contract. Seattle's first-round draft pick (third overall) in 1989, Salkeld was 8-5 and made 19 starts for Cincinnati in 1996 but spent last season in the minor leagues.

**PROBABLE PITCHERS:** Mike Hampton and Shane Reynolds should grab the first two rotation spots. **Chris Holt**, who pitched well as a rookie (209 innings, 3.52 ERA), should be the No. 3 starter, providing he returns to form after an October surgery on his rotator cuff. The No. 4 starter figures to be Garcia, who had a 9-8 record and a 3.69 ERA last season. The best bet for No. 5 starter is lefthander **John Halama**, 25, who last season was 13-3 at Class AAA New Orleans. Other possibilities are 21-year-old **Scott Elarton**, the organization's top pitching prospect, and lefty **Trevor Miller**, who was 6-7 with a 3.30 ERA in 29 games for New Orleans. —Alan Truex

# Cardinals



**BYE TO BENES?** Pitcher **Andy Benes**, who wouldn't have been available to the team until May 1 because of a snafu related to his contract negotiations, now may be lost

permanently. Benes will drop his grievance over the invalidation of his five-year, \$32.5 million contract and pursue his options as a free agent. The owners' Player Relations Committee ruled Benes' contract agreement with the club December 8 was reached a few hours after the midnight deadline for offering salary arbitration. A number of teams, including the Diamondbacks, Mets, Indians and perhaps the Cubs might be interested in Benes, 30, who was 10-7 in '97.

**LA RUSSA OPTIMISTIC:** The team's '97 injury list included **Brian Jordan**'s bulging disk and **Alan Benes'** rotator-cuff surgery. And new reliever **Jeff Brantley**, acquired from Cincinnati, had shoulder surgery. But manager **Tony La Russa** is optimistic all will be able to go when spring training starts. ... La Russa says catcher **Eli Marrero**, impressive late in the season, isn't necessarily the starter for '98. "If Marrero is the best guy, he catches," he says. "If Pags (**Tom Pagnozzi**) can get himself into great shape, he could be the starter and Marrero just has to wait his turn." —Rick Hummel

# Diamondbacks



**LOOKING FOR HELP:** The team was relatively quiet during the holiday weeks. But that didn't mean the expansion club wasn't plotting ways to improve itself. The obvious needs

are at second base and left field, where **Tony Batista** and **Yamil Benitez** are ranked No. 1 in each respective spot. The team doesn't feel entirely comfortable with either player. Neither Batista nor Benitez has played a full major league season, giving reason for concerns at each position. For the most part, the front office may end up waiting until just before spring training, or after it starts, to seek depth at each spot. Players tend to become available early in March, when clubs cut players with hefty salaries and are forced to pay only one-sixth of their 1998 salaries.

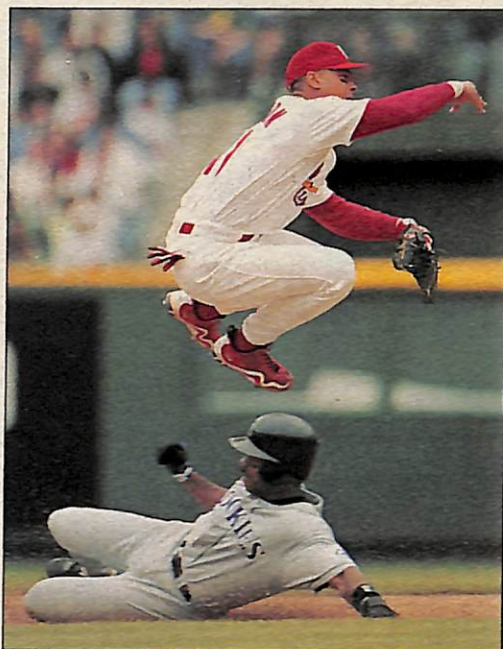
**PRESLEY IS IN THE BUILDING:** Former major league infielder **Jim Presley** was hired as the club's hitting coach, finalizing manager **Buck Showalter**'s staff. ... Among the front-office hires were: **Ralph Nelson**, director of baseball administration; **Sandy Johnson**, **Ron Hassey** and **Shotty Babitt**, special assistants to G.M. **Joe Garagiola Jr.**; **Steve Springer**, supervisor of scouts for the western region; and **James Keller** and **David Cassidy**, area supervisors. —Pedro Gomez

# Braves



**NOW HIRING:** With the loss of two young relievers, **John LeRoy** in the expansion draft and **Chad Fox** in a trade with Milwaukee, the team has two bullpen jobs open. The club hopes lefthander **Pedro Borbon** can return after missing last season following elbow surgery, but if he's not ready, rookie lefthander **John Rocker** might win a job. Rocker, who hasn't pitched above Class AA Greenville, gained valuable experience in the Arizona Fall League, then moved to the Puerto Rican League where he is 2-0 with a 0.90 ERA in seven appearances.

**EXPANSION'S LOSS:** Tampa Bay and Arizona might regret not picking first baseman **Randall Simon** in November's draft, shying away from him because of a partially dislocated shoulder. The injury should be fully healed by the start of spring training. Simon, who hit .308 at Class AAA Richmond last season, batted .400 in his first 13 games in the Dominican League before the injury and appears ready to be a backup to **Andres Galarraga**. ... The loss of backup first baseman and pinch hitter **Greg Colbrunn** to free agency opens a job on the bench. Likely candidates are **Mike Mordecai** and **Danny Bautista** and minor leaguers **Damon Hollins** and **Wes Helms**. —Bill Zack



IN THE CARDS: Clayton is arbitration eligible.

# Dodgers



**BUILDING A BENCH:** Assuming general manager **Fred Claire** is through tinkering with his starting lineup, one of his top priorities between now and opening day must be to strengthen the bench. Obtaining a lefthanded bat for pinch-hitting duties is a major objective. A crucial moment in last season's collapse came September 18 in San Francisco when manager **Bill Russell**, faced with an opportunity to beat the Giants in extra innings, called on 41-year-old **Eddie Murray** with the bases loaded. Murray weakly grounded into a double play, and the Giants went on to win the game. Russell was heavily criticized for that move. Russell was using weak-hitting **Nelson Liriano** (.227) as his main pinch hitter for much of the season. But the fact is, Russell didn't have many options because of a weak bench made weaker by injuries to **Todd Hollandsworth**, **Roger Cedeno** and **Brett Butler**. Neither Murray nor Liriano will be back.

**PLEADING HIS CASE:** The much-anticipated sale of the franchise from **Peter O'Malley** to **Rupert Murdoch** may be completed this month, which would enable Claire to deal directly with the Murdoch organization in his quest to spend more freely for talent. —Steve Springer

# Brewers



**WORKING VACATION:** Unhappy with his offensive production last season, shortstop **Jose Valentin** decided to work on his game by playing winter ball in Puerto Rico. By doing so, he willingly forfeited \$100,000, which is what the club would have paid him to sit out the winter. "I don't care about the money," he says. "If I'm a better player, I will get more money (in the future)." Club officials, who originally wanted Valentin to avoid injury and/or fatigue, are impressed with the decision. "It surprised me, but it made me feel good about him because he wants to get better," G.M. **Sal Bando** says, adding that the club may pay some or all of the bonus if Valentin has a good year at the plate.

**AT THE TABLE:** After taking a break for the holidays, team negotiators will continue to seek a multiyear deal for outfielder **Jerome Burnitz**. All of the other pending contracts will be one-year deals. ... Reliever **Doug Jones**, who established a club record with 36 saves last season, has been named the club's most valuable player. ... With **Matt Mieske** now playing for the Cubs, the club will need to elect a new representative to the players union. Starting pitcher **Cal Eldred** is a leading candidate. —Drew Olson

# Cubs



**LAST HOLE FILLED:** Having already added a shortstop, in **Jeff Blauser**, and a left fielder, in **Henry Rodriguez**, the team filled its final major hole by trading outfielder

**Doug Glanville** to the Phillies for second baseman **Mickey Morandini**. Morandini, 31, has the unenviable task of replacing future Hall of Famer **Ryne Sandberg**, but no one will be expecting power numbers from him. The club will be looking for good range and solid fielding. Morandini, an experienced No. 2 hitter, hit a career-high .295 with one homer, 40 doubles and 39 RBIs in '97. He made only six errors in 610 chances.

**PEAKED OUT?** In trading Glanville, 27, the club gave up its No. 1 draft pick in 1991 and its onetime center fielder of the future. "We thought an awful lot of Doug Glanville," G.M. **Ed Lynch** says, "but you have to give up a quality player to get a quality player." The truth is the Cubs didn't think Glanville would get much better than he was in '97, when he hit .300 with four homers and 35 RBIs in his first full major league season. ... The team added a veteran presence to its outfield bench by signing free agent **Matt Mieske** to a one-year contract. Mieske, 29, batted .249 with five homers and 21 RBIs for the Brewers in '97. —Barry Rozner

# Expos



**SEEKING AN ANSWER:** The club faces a big problem in finding a replacement for left fielder **Henry Rodriguez**, who was traded to the Cubs last month. The top candidates are **F.P. Santangelo** and **Ryan McGuire**. Manager **Felipe Alou** undoubtedly would prefer to have Santangelo available for bench duty. He thinks Santangelo is a better player with regular rest—although he put together an 18-game hitting streak last season. McGuire tailed off in the second half after making a strong impression upon being recalled from Class AAA Ottawa. ... There is speculation about the move of young infielder **Hiram Bocachica** to the outfield—possibly even to center—to give the organization some depth. Bocachica has had problems defensively at shortstop, and the system's next outstanding outfield prospect, **Milton Bradley**, is two to three years away.

**NAME GAME:** The team will deal with two players in arbitration—pitcher **Carlos Perez** and third baseman **Shane Andrews**. ... Righthander **Matt Wagner**, who missed all of last season after shoulder surgery, is making a strong recovery and could contend for a rotation spot. Wagner was acquired in October 1996 from the Mariners. —Jeff Blair



## Giants



**UP PERISCOPE:** The club has taken care of a large hole in its bullpen by signing free-agent righthander **Steve Reed**. The submarine pitcher becomes a setup man for new closer

**Robb Nen**, and his presence frees **Julian Tavarez** to become a starter. The team has always regretted losing Reed to the Rockies in the 1992 expansion draft. He fits G.M. **Brian Sabean's** ideal for a relief pitcher—he is relatively young (31), healthy and durable (more than 300 appearances in five years with the Rockies). ... Though the outfield shapes up as **Barry Bonds** in left, **Darryl Hamilton** in center and **Stan Javier** in right, prospects **Jacob Cruz** and **Dante Powell** might get long looks this spring. Javier's lack of power is a concern, but his hustle, defense and consistent hitting are major pluses.

**INTRIGUING:** The shortstop competition could be more heated than originally thought. With **Jose Vizcaino** having signed with the Dodgers, it was assumed that backup **Rich Aurilia** would get the job. But the club has made it clear that rookie **Wilson Delgado** will receive an equal chance. ... Critics who ripped Sabean for trading **Matt Williams** are now reluctant to say anything negative about his moves. —Henry Schulman

## Padres



**IMPORTING RELIEF:** General manager **Kevin Towers** says Mexican pitcher **Roberto Ramirez** might win a bullpen spot in spring camp. The lefthander pitched for the Mexico City Reds

last year and was 12-4 with a 3.74 ERA. In his career, Ramirez has a 68-32 record and a 3.36 ERA in 134 games. Two facts to remember: The Pirates, whose agreement with the Mexico City team brought them pitchers **Francisco Cordova** and **Ricardo Rincon**, chose not to sign Ramirez despite having first dibs on him. Also, Ramirez is accustomed to starting games. He has made nine relief appearances in his career and failed to pick up a save in those situations.

**BACK IN FAMILIAR TERRITORY:** On March 13, the club will play an exhibition game in its former spring home—Yuma's Desert Sun Stadium. The Padres, who will face the Diamondbacks, haven't been stationed in Yuma since 1993. ... Top exhibition attraction: The Yankees will play two games against the Padres in San Diego on March 28-29. San Diegans will turn out in droves to see Yankees pitcher **Hideki Irabu**, who infuriated Padres fans last spring when he refused to sign with the club and insisted he would play only for the Yankees. —Tom Krasovic

## Pirates



**THE BIG JUMP?** Could **Aramis Ramirez** follow **Jose Guillen** and jump from Class A to the big leagues? Some of the circumstances are similar: They're both prime

prospects and each plays a position where the club has an immediate need. In Ramirez's case, it's third base, which became vacant when **Joe Randa** was lost in the expansion draft. Ideally, Ramirez would spend another season in the minors, but the club won't close the door on his making the majors. It makes sense to let Ramirez come to camp with a chance to impress the staff. If Ramirez has a strong camp, he'll give G.M. **Cam Bonifay** and manager **Gene Lamont** something to discuss in their daily meetings.

**A CHANCE TO PLAY:** After wasting a season on the bench, **Emil Brown** got a chance to play in the Arizona Fall League. He'll compete for the center field job this spring, along with holdovers **Jermaine Allensworth** and **Adrian Brown**. If Brown isn't going to get significant playing time in the big leagues, he is better off playing regularly in the minors. ... Bonifay is a big believer in the fall league because of the caliber of competition. He thinks some players can advance by as much as half a season by playing in the league. —John Mehno

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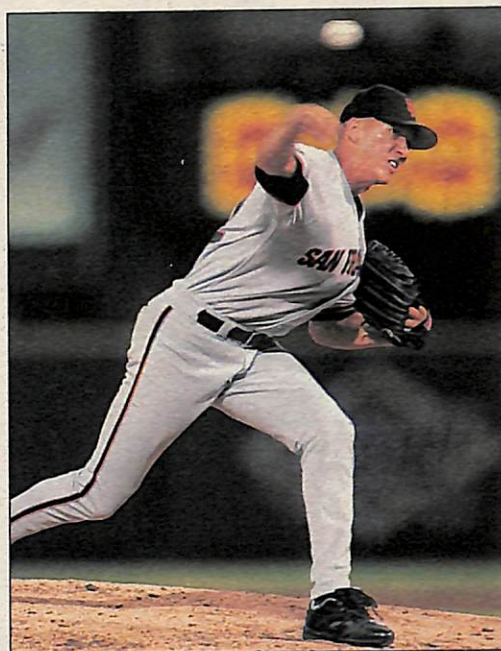
## Marlins



**BUYER BEWARE:** Team president **Don Smiley** still is trying to get \$150 million together to buy the club. Smiley was to submit his list of investors by December 5. Owner

**Wayne Huizenga** extended the deadline another two weeks, and the deal still is not complete. It seems likely Huizenga will give Smiley more time and might retain ownership into next season if the money is not raised by then. Smiley is confident he'll get the money, but instead of finding 30 investors to each contribute \$5 million (his original plan), the group will include fewer investors and also some debt, such as a loan.

**FOUNDING FATHERS:** Both of the original Marlins who remained on last season's world championship roster are now gone. **Jeff Conine** was traded to the Royals last month, and **Alex Arias**, a utility infielder, was released by the Marlins after the season and signed a \$425,000 one-year deal with the Phillies. Arias hit .247 with a homer and 11 RBIs in 74 games in '97. ... General manager **Dave Dombrowski** was on vacation over Christmas, which meant nobody was traded. It looks as if **Gary Sheffield** will remain with the team—at least to start next season—as his \$61 million contract makes him a tough product to move. —Cheryl Rosenberg



MOVING ON UP: Tavarez is free to join the rotation.

## Reds



**A HUGE HOLE:** Changes in the front-office staff usually go unnoticed, but one recent change could have long-lasting repercussions on the growth of the organization. **Julian Mock** took

with him 21 years of experience, including overseeing the scouting department since 1990, when he left the team. That kind of experience isn't easily replaced, but the team took a bold step in hiring **De Jon Watson**, 31, who spent the previous four seasons in the Marlins' organization. The team is hoping the Latin connections Watson made will carry over. Also hired as director of player personnel was **Muzzy Jackson**, 29. Jackson comes from the Royals, whose farm system produced 18 major league players in the last five years—a success rate the Reds would love to duplicate.

**GREENE DAY:** Outfielder **Mel Nieves** was signed to a one-year contract, leaving third baseman **Willie Greene** as the only arbitration-eligible player still unsigned. The Greene situation could be unsettling, considering his numbers last season (26 homers, 91 RBIs) figure to launch him into seven figures. Though Greene has yet to reach his power potential—or establish himself as a clutch performer capable of carrying a team—the team wants to keep him. —Mike Bass

## Mets



**STANDING ROOM ONLY:** Though the stands may not be full, seats will be hard to come by in the bullpen. The team has an assortment of relievers, most of whom are veteran major

leaguers. And in an expansion season, where pitching quality can be lacking, the club has put itself in a great position to make midseason deals with its depth. The bullpen has **John Franco**, **Mel Rojas**, **Greg McMichael**, **Dennis Cook**, **Turk Wendell**, **John Hudek**, **Derek Wallace** and **Hector Mercado**. Among those eight, Mercado is the only one without a major league save.

**ON THE MOUND:** The rotation also has many candidates, though only **Bobby Jones** (15-9) and **Rick Reed** (13-9) have compelling platforms. **Dave Mlicki** (8-12), **Bill Pulsipher** (5-7 in 1995), **Armando Reynoso** (6-3), **Brian Bohanon** (6-4) and **Paul Wilson** (5-12 in 1996) also are candidates. **Jason Isringhausen** (2-2), who has battled an elbow injury, will likely miss next season. ... Infielder/outfielder **Jim Tatum** was signed to a minor league contract and invited to spring training. Also signed and invited: infielders/outfielders **Shawn Gilbert** and **Craig Paquette**, outfielder **Brent Bowers**, catcher **Pedro Grifol**, second baseman **Todd Haney** and pitchers **Mike Mimbs**, **Mike Fyhrie** and **Rick Tricek**. —Marty Noble

## Phillies



**CATCHING A FISH:** Proving that hard work and baseball negotiations have no holiday boundaries, acting general manager **Ed Wade** signed **Alex Arias** to a one-year deal, worth

\$425,000, at 10:20 p.m. on Christmas Eve. The signing of Arias, 30, ends Wade's search for a veteran backup to provide insurance for rookie shortstop **Desi Relaford**.

**PARTING COMMENT:** Former second baseman **Mickey Morandini**, who was traded to the Cubs last month, had this to say about the changes on the team: "There's no question the Phillies are going to take some getting used to up the middle. But they said a year-and-a-half ago they were rebuilding, and they are following up on what they said they were going to do. Do I foresee them winning this year? Probably not. But two, three, four years down the road, they could be competitive because they have athleticism." ... Wade is still looking to improve the bullpen, but he's not even close to signing a reliever. "We've talked to a couple people," Wade says, "but they are sort of similar to the guys we already have." ... Outfielder **Doug Glanville** has returned to Arizona to continue a rigorous offseason conditioning program. —Chris Edwards

## Rockies



**RUFFIN IT:** Last year's oft-injured closer, **Bruce Ruffin**, is beginning to long toss, his latest step in coming back from arm surgery in July. Even though he won't pitch off a mound

for a while, the team still thinks enough of Ruffin to re-sign him once he's healthy. In fact, management believes in him enough to re-sign him without sending a scout to any of his workouts. A healthy Ruffin would give the pitching staff a huge, unforeseen addition. The signings of relievers **Dave Veres** and **Chuck McElroy** already improve bullpen depth, and Ruffin's return would give the team closers from the right and left side. Late last season, the team christened righthander **Jerry DiPoto**, who had 14 of his 16 saves in August and September, as its closer for 1998. Ruffin, McElroy and Veres, whose sinker should suit Coors Field, should more than make up for the loss of **Steve Reed**, **Darren Holmes** and **Mark Hutton**.

**SHORING UP:** Talks soon will begin with **Pedro Astacio** on a long-term deal. If the team can sign Astacio for a similar three-year deal as **Darryl Kile**, it will have two stalwart pitchers tied up through 2000. ... Infield depth was added with the signing of first baseman **Greg Colbrunn**. He'll back up **Todd Helton**. —John Henderson



## Angels



**THE BIG CHANCE:** Todd Greene may not be the second coming of Charles Johnson or Ivan Rodriguez, but after years of being touted as one of baseball's best prospects, Greene will open spring training as the team's No. 1 catcher. If Greene remains healthy—and that is a big if—he will catch four or five games a week and log around 500 at-bats. The Angels thought so much of Greene, 26, that they traded catcher Jim Leyritz to Texas for Ken Hill in late July and handed the job to Greene, who rewarded them with six homers and 16 RBIs in 18 games before breaking a bone in his right wrist on August 20. The injury knocked Greene out for the season, and while he was being treated, he mentioned the shoulder that had been bothering him for most of his brief stay in Anaheim. Turns out Greene had a partial tear in his labrum, which was surgically repaired in early November. "I wasn't going to leave the lineup once I got in it," Greene says.

**NO DEALS IMMINENT:** The signing of Cecil Fielder refueled speculation the team would look to trade Jim Edmonds or Garret Anderson for a starting pitcher and move first baseman Darin Erstad back to his natural outfield position. But G.M. Bill Bavasi says the addition of Fielder won't lead to the subtraction of Edmonds or Anderson. ... The team would like to add a lefthanded-hitting middle infielder. —Mike DiGiovanna

## Blue Jays



**GIFT GIVING:** All Randy Myers wanted for Christmas was a bobcat-like piece of industrial equipment to work his land in Vancouver, Wash. He gave it to himself—no help from Santa needed—after signing a three-year, \$18 million contract with the club. Some fans are still questioning why G.M. Gord Ash made Myers (45 saves) his premier free-agent signee when the offense desperately needs improvement. After all, Ash identified rookie Kelvim Escobar (14 saves in 17 chances) as the closer-of-the-future. But the team couldn't risk a repeat of last season, when the bullpen failed to convert 21-of-55 save opportunities and ranked 26th among the 28 teams in the Rolaids Relief standings.

**IN A PINCH:** When the team lost to Tampa Bay in bidding for Dave Martinez recently, the search for a veteran outfielder/pinch hitter continued. The club's pinch hitting ranked last in the A.L. last year with a .127 average that sank to .094 with runners on base. ... Righthander Erik Hanson was restricted to two starts and three appearances last season because of fraying under the rotator cuff that required surgery in May. Now he is buoyant as he enters the final season of a three-year deal, insisting that his arm feels re-born. ... Attendance increased by only 29,724 over 1996 in spite of the signing of Cy Young winner Roger Clemens to a \$31 million contract. —Tom Maloney

## Indians



**WHAT A MESA:** After the tumultuous season endured by closer Jose Mesa, the team was eyeing free agent Rod Beck. Mesa had 16 saves with a 2.40 ERA but converted only 6-of-12 chances in one-run situations. He also lost his closer's job during the season and didn't regain it until August. The team would have to deal Mesa, who can be a free agent after the 1998 season, before signing Beck. The team considers Mesa's demand for a long-term deal for close to \$5 million a year too high. Beck, 29, would come more cheaply. Mesa's listed age is 31, but some believe he's closer to 34.

**EYE ON THE INFELD:** The team still is talking with Shawn Dunston to help out at second base. Apparently Dunston—who will turn 35 before the start of the season—would prefer to sign with a team that will allow him to continue to play shortstop, but Dunston has some interest in playing with the Indians. ... Manager Mike Hargrove has no criticism of Dave Nelson, even though Nelson was fired after last season and Al Bumbry will be the new first base and baserunning coach. Bumbry also will assume Nelson's duties as outfield coach. Nelson, meanwhile is a candidate to replace Herb Score as one of the team's radio announcers. ... The team has to pay \$2,065,496 to the commissioner's office in the first year of baseball's luxury tax. —Steve Herrick



**ENOUGH IS ENOUGH:** Troubled Mesa is too pricey.

## Athletics



**THE FETTERS EFFECT:** The team is looking for a ripple effect from the acquisition of Mike Fetters. If he takes over the job as closer, as expected, then it could improve the entire staff down the line. "I think Mike's track record is good and he's proven himself to be a capable closer," G.M. Billy Beane says. "He'll be given every opportunity to win that role." Billy Taylor, last year's closer, did manage 23 saves but blew seven. After a stretch of going 2-for-6 in save chances in July and August, he was removed from the closer job and the A's went with closer-by-committee. If Fetters emerges as the closer, then Taylor can become a righthanded setup man along with Doug Bochtler. That, in turn, would move Aaron Small into long/middle relief. That would give the A's a better fit in those roles, which in turn would give the starters a boost. From the likes of Don Wengert, Billy Brewer, Tim Kubinski, Richie Lewis and Steve Montgomery, the A's got dreadful middle relief in 1997. Fetters, who saved 32 games for the Brewers in 1996, was 1-5 with six saves last year, but his ERA was a respectable 3.45.

**MACK ATTACK:** Newly signed Shane Mack could become the regular left fielder, freeing Matt Stairs for DH duty. If the team signs Rickey Henderson for left field, a good possibility, then Mack would compete with Jason McDonald in center. —David Bush

## Devil Rays



**WELL-STOCKED:** In addition to a payroll of approximately \$26 million, the team will have something else previous expansion teams didn't—depth. At least at some positions. At first base, they have two star-quality starters in Fred McGriff and Paul Sorrento, a talented late-inning defensive specialist in Dave Martinez and a few promising younger players in Herbert Perry, Brooks Kieschnick and Steve Cox. Plus, minor league veteran Russ Morman was signed to a Class AAA contract. The plan is to play McGriff at first most days, with Sorrento serving as DH. Martinez will likely be the starting right fielder but occasionally will move to first. Perry could make the team as a reserve. ... The team also is deep behind the plate with John Flaherty, who has been a regular the past three seasons with Detroit and San Diego, and Mike Difelice, who started 91 games for the Cardinals last season, more than any other St. Louis catcher. Flaherty will be the team's primary starter, but Difelice, 28, will get the opportunity to show whether he is the future starter.

**BACK ON BOARD:** Lefthander Ryan Karp, the only player not tendered a contract by the December 20 deadline, signed a minor league deal with the team. ... Outfielder Rich Butler and second baseman Miguel Cairo are teammates with the Lara club in the Venezuelan Winter League. —Marc Topkin

## Mariners



**STILL HOPING:** With spring training less than two months away, ace lefthander Randy Johnson still is waiting and hoping to be traded. Johnson says even if the team offers him a contract extension, he won't accept it. The team already has said it won't offer the winningest pitcher in franchise history an extension. So far, V.P. of baseball operations Woody Woodward has rejected trade proposals from the Yankees, Mets, Indians and Blue Jays. ... The team may get reliever Rafael Carmona back sooner than expected. Carmona, who broke bones in his right (pitching) arm in three places in a car accident in Puerto Rico last month, was examined by team physician Dr. Larry Pedegana. The fractures are healing so well Pedegana says Carmona might be throwing again in five to six weeks. Carmona had been expected to be out of action for seven or eight months.

**PRETTY WELL SET:** Pending the Johnson situation, the roster appears set going into camp. The recent signing of closer Heathcliff Slocumb helps. ... The team surprisingly offered righthander Felipe Lira, eligible for arbitration, a contract. He performed poorly (0-4, 9.16 ERA) with the team last season. But manager Lou Piniella at least has Lira penciled in for spring training. "He is a guy who might step forward," Piniella says. "He pitched well at times in the past, although he didn't contribute as we had hoped." —Jim Street

## Orioles



**ONE MORE CHANCE?** With the recent acquisitions of Joe Carter, Doug Drabek and Norm Charlton, the team has taken on a much older look. That is cause for some alarm, because a couple of the club's top offensive producers could be gone after this season. Second baseman Roberto Alomar and first baseman Rafael Palmeiro are entering the final year of their multiyear contracts. Both figure to command big dollars in the free-agent market, so there is the growing fear 1998 is the last chance for the team to win another World Series in the Cal Ripken era. The team, however, is likely to at least remain competitive beyond next year. Owner Peter Angelos, who played a personal role in negotiations to retain Ripken, Mike Mussina and Brady Anderson, figures to take a similar interest in contract talks with Alomar and Palmeiro.

**AT THE DISH:** The team apparently is content to enter the season with the same catching arrangement as last year. Chris Hoiles is expected to start about 100 games, with reserve Lenny Webster getting significant time. Though Webster started only 73 games last year, he tied for 15th in the league in assists (36). Hoiles has taken some heat for his arm, but he remains one of the league's better-hitting catchers, a trade-off the club appears to be willing to accept for the remaining two years of his contract. —Peter Schmuck



# Rangers



**COLD WINTER:** Fernando Tatis, who is expected to start at third, hit .206 through his first 102 at-bats with an on-base percentage of .283 in the Dominican Republic Winter League. "You can look at it two ways," farm director **Reid Nichols** says. "Either he will learn from something like this or he will work much harder during spring training. At this point, I'm not too concerned." The club doesn't want Tatis to think he has won the position because it wants to see him make a significant effort. He did reasonably well when the Rangers promoted him from Class AA in late July to replace **Dean Palmer**, hitting .256 with eight home runs. But Tatis has shown a tendency throughout his career to overswing. One scout who has seen him play this winter says, "If you saw what I saw down there, you'd be a little concerned."

**GETTING WARMER:** **Julio Santana**, who went through a turbulent rookie year (4-6, 6.75 ERA), is 4-1 with a 3.05 ERA in the Dominican Republic. He will compete in the spring for a long-relief role. ... Righthander and 1996 first-round pick **R.A. Dickey** is rebounding nicely from his June elbow surgery. Dickey has stayed on course with his rehabilitation, and he is 3-0 with a 1.16 ERA in the Hawaiian League. He has made two starts but is averaging fewer than two innings per outing. Dickey probably will start the season at Class A Charlotte. —Kevin Lonquist

# Royals



**OFFSEASON REVIEW:** After the team signed **Hal Morris** to be the DH (and to occasionally spell **Jeff King** at first base), all that's left now is to see how it all shakes down at spring training. Here is the team's offseason in review: At the expansion draft, the Royals lost an outfielder (**Yamil Benitez**) who didn't show enough power and a pitcher (**Hector Carrasco**) they had soured on. They traded for a guy who played a lot of first base the last five years (**Jeff Conine**) to play left field. They lost two of their three most productive bats of 1997 (**Jay Bell**, **Chili Davis**) but held onto a third baseman (**Dean Palmer**) who can hit home runs. And they brought in infielder **Orlando Miller**, late of the Tigers, to safeguard against any growing pains **Felix Martinez** may experience in his first full year at shortstop.

**EVERYWHERE MAN:** **Shane Halter** is a jack-of-all-trades. He played three infield positions and in the outfield as a rookie last season and spent time in Florida this fall learning how to catch. Halter, 28, could possibly fill in at eight positions. ... Though they had a lot of problems with their pitching staff and bullpen in '97, the Royals' move to retain Palmer may have been their best offseason move. Three A.L. Central opponents finished ahead of them in average and all their division foes drove in more runs. Palmer is a legitimate power hitter who can provide instant offense. —Luciana Chavez

# Twins



**FILLING HOLES:** Two prime weaknesses—pitching and power—might be addressed if deals can be reached with a pair of free agents. The team has been talking to former Brewers righthander **Ricky Bones** and first baseman-DH **Darren Daulton**, who finished '97 with the Marlins. Since the team was unable to sign **Joe Carter** or **Cecil Fielder**, Daulton could be the answer at first base. **Scott Stahoviak**, last season's starter, has been taken off the 40-man roster. If the team can't land Daulton, **Ron Coomer** might be moved from third to first, with **Todd Walker** taking over at third. ... As the waiting game continued on the **Chuck Knoblauch** trade front, agent **Alan Hendricks**, without explicitly saying so, appeared to send the team a warning that it had better deal Knoblauch before spring training. G.M. **Terry Ryan** seems to be in no hurry to make a deal.

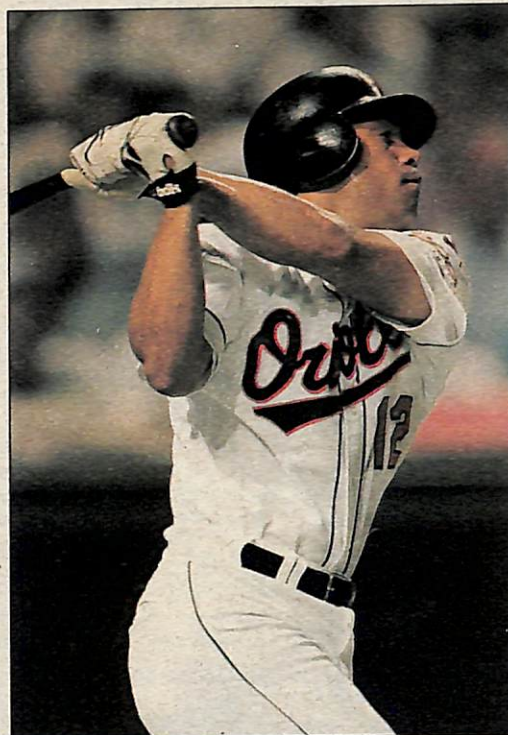
**OPTIONS:** Signing **Brent Gates** to a minor league contract gives the team another possibility, should Knoblauch be traded; Gates can play second or third. He hit .238 with three homers and 20 RBIs for Seattle in '97. ... The 12 non-roster players invited to the major league camp at spring training are: pitchers **Travis Baptist** and **Shane Bowers**; catchers **Matt LeCroy**, **Jayhawk Owens** and **Chris Turner**; infielders **Stahoviak**, **Gates**, **Esteban Beltre**, **Ryan Lane** and **Jon Shave**; and outfielders **Keith LeGree** and **Jamie Ogden**. —John Milleda

# Red Sox



**DEFENSIVE MOVE:** The team addressed its outfield void by signing free agent **Darren Lewis**, who will likely start in center field ahead of **Damon Buford** and **Darren Bragg**. Though Lewis, a former Gold Glove winner, will improve the defense, he does nothing to boost an offense that lost troubled-but-talented left fielder **Wil Cordero**. Lewis is a .247 lifetime hitter with good speed and little power. If he can get on base, he could hit at the top of the lineup, enabling **Nomar Garciaparra** to hit in a run-producing spot lower in the order. **Troy O'Leary** will start on one side of Lewis. Bragg will compete with rookies **Michael Coleman** and **Trot Nixon** for the other outfield spot.

**THE CEO SPEAKS:** CEO **John Harrington** told a Boston radio talk show that the team's payroll will probably reach \$50 million in '98 and perhaps \$70 million in '99. Ticket prices also are likely to rise. Harrington defended **Pedro Martinez's** six-year, \$75 million contract, saying "In the next four or five years, we'll be better off with Pedro." ... **John Valentin** wasn't happy with the sweetened proposal the team offered him, so he seems headed to arbitration and is intent on free agency after this season. Attempts to trade him have produced no interest. ... Lewis signed for about half of the \$1.3 million he made last season, which means the team probably won't pursue another free agent like **Rickey Henderson** or **Darren Daulton**. —Paul Doyle



ONE MORE YEAR: Alomar could be gone after '98.

# White Sox



**MEET MR. BELLE:** New manager **Jerry Manuel** says he is looking forward to meeting **Albert Belle** and getting to know one of baseball's most controversial players. And Belle makes it clear that he has a high opinion of Manuel. "I thought he was the most qualified manager out there," Belle says. "I'm very happy they hired him." Belle seemed to have few problems with former manager **Terry Bevington**. But, much like teammate **Frank Thomas**, Belle hinted that Bevington didn't have too many backers in the clubhouse last season.

**JACK'S BACK?** Righthander **Jack McDowell** publicly sparred often with chairman **Jerry Reinsdorf** over contracts before he was traded to the Yankees for outfielder **Lyle Mouton** following the '94 season. After spending the last two seasons with the Indians, McDowell is now on the free-agent market and there has been talk about a return to Chicago. "We might have some interest," G.M. **Ron Schueler** says. "But there are a lot of medical questions." McDowell pitched in only eight games for Cleveland in '97 before an elbow injury ended his season. With young lefthanders **Scott Eyre** and **Mike Sirotka** currently favored to fill the No. 4 and 5 spots in the rotation, Schueler is looking for a veteran to provide insurance. The remaining free-agent market is pretty bare, which makes McDowell a possibility—for the right price. —Scot Gregor

# Tigers



**NEW LOOK IN '98:** With four of the nine spots in the batting order probably filled by new players, and half the pitching staff changed as well, the team will have a much different look. The newcomers in the everyday lineup include **Bip Roberts** at DH, **Luis Gonzalez** in left field, **Joe Randa** at third base and **Joe Oliver**, who's likely to platoon with **Raul Casanova** behind the plate. As for the pitching staff, the newcomers include **Frank Castillo**, plus either **Bryce Florie** or **Tim Worrell** in the rotation. Lefthander **Sean Runyan**, a Rule 5 draftee from San Diego, will get a chance at a bullpen position. Runyan, 23, was 5-2 with a 2.34 ERA at Class AA Mobile last season, but in his last 29 appearances, he produced a 1.61 ERA.

**CROWDED CAMP:** It's going to be a crowded spring training. Sixteen players, including **Andy Tomberlin**—who has played for the Pirates, Red Sox, A's and Mets in his 10-year pro career—have received non-roster invitations. A lefthanded-hitting outfielder, Tomberlin, 31, will compete for the final spot on the roster. Also among the invitees is righthander **Denny Harriger**, who was 11-8 with a 3.99 ERA at Class AAA Toledo last year. Harriger should be given the ball after the first pitch he throws in the majors, if it ever happens. He is entering his 12th season of pro ball but has yet to make it past Class AAA. —Tom Gage

# Yankees



**WHAT'S NOT TO LIKE?** The team hasn't made a big splash yet this winter, failing to land a big-name pitcher or a star at second base or third base. But G.M. **Bob Watson** says things aren't so bad. "The club is in pretty good shape," Watson says. "I'd love to improve pitching-wise. But I like what we've done so far. I'll take my chances going into camp." The Yankees still have their eye on Mariners lefthander **Randy Johnson** and Twins second baseman **Chuck Knoblauch**. Johnson joined Knoblauch in speaking out about his desire to become a Yankee, and the Big Unit went one step further, criticizing the Mariners for demanding **Andy Pettitte** and **Mariano Rivera**. The Yankees have been unwilling to surrender Pettitte, which is understandable since Johnson is eligible for free agency after the 1998 season and Pettitte is only arbitration eligible.

**STRAW TALKS:** The Yankees continue to negotiate with **Darryl Strawberry**, who made \$750,000 in '97. Strawberry has been working out for the team in Tampa in hopes of proving that his left knee has healed sufficiently. ... Watson says even though **Andy Benes** is now available as a free agent, the Yankees will not pursue him. ... Top outfield prospect **Ricky Ledee** has played well in the Puerto Rican Winter League, but the signing of **Tim Lincecum** means Ledee is unlikely to get a big opportunity in '98. —Jon Heyman



# The Sports MARKETPLACE

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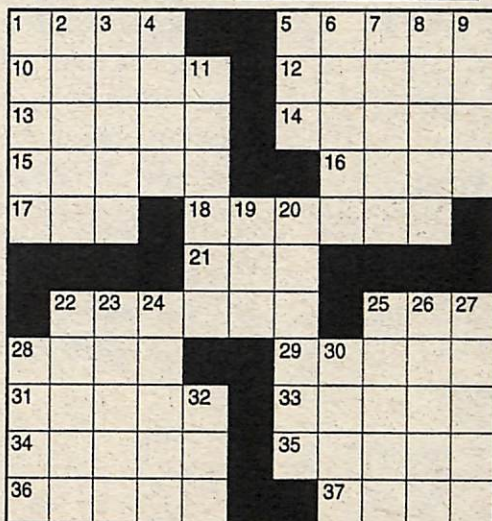
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- ACROSS
- 1 Lions coach Bobby
  - 5 Bob pitched for Texas & the Expos
  - 10 Lameck won the '97 Boston Marathon
  - 12 Misplay
  - 13 Ran in neutral
  - 14 Cold slope cover
  - 15 Dick won the Padres' first game (1969)
  - 16 Dollar bills
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  - 18 Lawyer in the NFL
  - 21 Duva or Nova
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  - 25 Single-cell protein (abbr.)
  - 28 Tight end Armstrong
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  - 31 Puckster Kindrachuk
  - 33 Cisco pitched for the original Royals
  - 34 Mike won the Stanley Cup with Colorado
  - 35 Socks stuff
  - 36 Brit singer John
  - 37 "Auld Lang —"

### Sporting News Sports Puzzle



- DOWN
- 1 Skier Smetanina won 10 Olympic medals
  - 2 Weber State's city
  - 3 Ivory in football
  - 4 Gymnastics ring rise
  - 5 Vols' conf.
  - 6 Leg Mann
  - 7 Tom Brunansky
  - 8 Roosevelt Grier
  - 9 Martial —
  - 11 American Gladiators host who ran in the NFL
  - 19 NHL ref Mickey in the Hockey Hall of Fame
  - 20 Islanders made Roberto the highest-drafted goalie ever in 1997 (fourth pick overall)
  - 22 Pigskin's Pinder
  - 23 Throw out
  - 24 "Dan" Ford
  - 25 Little on the links
  - 26 Met Jones
  - 27 Pasta tubes
  - 28 Ripped
  - 30 Pair pinned back?
  - 32 Costner's cup

Answers found on page 62.

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THE SPORTS MARKETPLACE CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE



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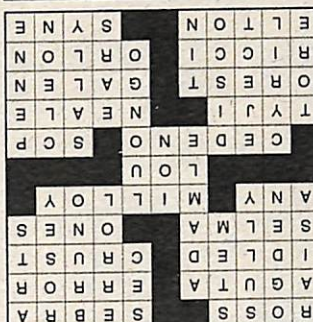
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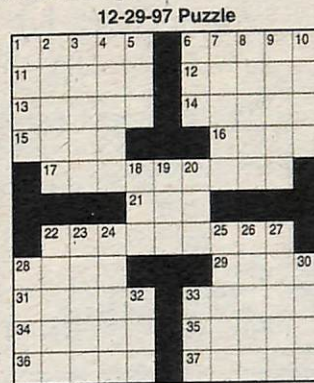
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The puzzle in the 12-22-97 and the 12-29-97 issues were incorrectly published. Our apologies for the inconvenience. The following are the correct puzzles.



## SportingNews

**Trivia Answer**  
Answer to last week's trivia question:  
Jim Plunkett

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## SportingNews

## Trivia Test

Name the San Diego Padres 1st baseman who dislocated his thumb while sliding into home during a July 29, 1983 game at Atlanta, ending his NL record ironman streak at 1,207 games.

Look for the answer in next week's TSN issue. The answer will appear in The Sports Marketplace section.

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**Dave Kindred**

## The *real* crazies of the ACC

**W**ithin an hour of buying it, I misplaced John Feinstein's mystery novel, *Running Mates*. So I bought a second copy. What are friends for if not to buy their friend's books?

In what might have been humility had it not been the truth, John told me, "Thanks, you doubled the sales."

My purchase of two books was such a good deed that he continues to punish me by delivering his new books the moment they come off the press.

They arrive with astonishing regularity, the UPS truck trundling down the lane every hour or so. If it's not a Feinstein novel, it's another year's reporting on America's games. He does baseball and golf, tennis and football. And this basketball junkie spends his winters hunkered down in arenas from which he emerges to do what great reporters do: With a thousand threads of stories, he weaves a single fabric making sense of what has confounded us.

John's new book is *A March to Madness*. Its madhouse milieu is Tobacco Road, its characters nine fugitives from reason. They're the coaches of Atlantic Coast Conference teams. As Al McGuire once said, "Coaching in the ACC is the first sign of insanity." Late in his ACC tenure, Bill Foster laughed and said, "But ... it ... hasn't ... bothered ... me ... at ... all," each word punctuated by a twitch so severe he seemed to be biting the head off a bird on his shoulder.

"Big-time college basketball is a coach's game," Feinstein writes. "The players, no matter how brilliant, come and go—faster all the time these days—so the constant is the coaches. Inevitably, they become the stars ... and in some cases become raving, raging egomaniacs."

One ACC coach taunts an opponent by singing the loser's fight song in his winning locker room. One puts his considerable schnoz in another's face and dares him, "Go ahead and hit me." One is described as "the sneakiest guy I know." One begs referees for a break. One scolds opposing players. One delivers famous barbs, such as this to a Notre Dame coach whom he beat 20 years earlier, "On St. Patty's day, too. Can you imagine that? Notre Dame losing on St. Patty's day."

When I say one coach, I mean one coach did all those things.

Take a guess as to which of the nine madmen it is.

Mike Krzyzewski at Duke? Rick Barnes at Clemson? Wake Forest's Dave Odom? (No, he's the one who out of superstition irons his shirt on game days.) Gary Williams of Maryland? Georgia Tech's Bobby Cremins? (No, he is the one who, being recruited by legendary Frank McGuire, went to the coach's house and said, "Nice pad, Frank.")

No, it's none of these suspects.

It's Dean Smith.

I report this with admiration, as does Feinstein, whose



**TOBACCO ROW:** Despite their glowing images, Krzyzewski and Smith were not beneath carping at each other.



book allows us not only to see but to feel the fire that burned so brightly for so long in Dean Edwards Smith, the winningest coach in college basketball history.

Son of a coach, husband of a psychologist, an athlete who played the authority positions (quarterback, point guard, catcher), a liberal whose ideals and energy created in 36 years at North Carolina the model of what college athletics ought to be, Dean Smith confirmed the heat of that fire with an allusion to his first season:

"I remember the first game we lost. I walked out of the gym that night thinking, 'The heck with this coaching.'" Three decades had passed, nearly 900 victories had come, his teams had won two national championships. So Smith smiled. "Of course, now when we lose, it's completely different. I think, 'The heck with this coaching.'"

His relationship with Krzyzewski is also telling. As Krzyzewski built Duke, he went public with what coaches long had said in private: There is a double standard in ACC officiating—one for North Carolina, another for everyone else. Infuriated then, Smith is infuriated still.

In 1993 at Chapel Hill, Krzyzewski and Smith screamed at referee Lenny Wirtz until Wirtz said, "Look, guys, I know it's a big game ... but you have to let us work the game. You can't be up on every call."

Krzyzewski smiled. "Lenny, there are 21,000 people in here who are all against me. You three guys are the only ones I feel comfortable talking to."

Seeing Wirtz smile, Smith jumped in. "Lenny, don't let him do that. Don't you see what he's trying to do?"

"Dean, you know," Krzyzewski said, "you're just full of ..."

Back at his bench, Krzyzewski told his assistants, "If I ever for one minute start to act like him, don't ask a single question. Just get a gun and shoot me."

Smith retired three months ago, Feinstein argues, because coaching was not as much fun. Today's players had worn him down: "Players who often didn't listen; players who had little interest in graduating; players who would trash-talk opponents, referees and fans ..."

Feinstein also saw the hidden truth in Smith's farewell speech in which he said he quit now because he didn't want to go around the league one last time. Can you imagine, the coach said, "having people act as if they liked me?"

It was more than a throwaway line. "So much of Dean Smith was about *competing*," Feinstein writes, "that the idea of having his competitors be nice to him was anathema—even if they meant it."

TSN

Dave Kindred is a contributing writer for THE SPORTING NEWS.



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